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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

A New Mike Shayne Adventure

A DARK NIGHT WITH

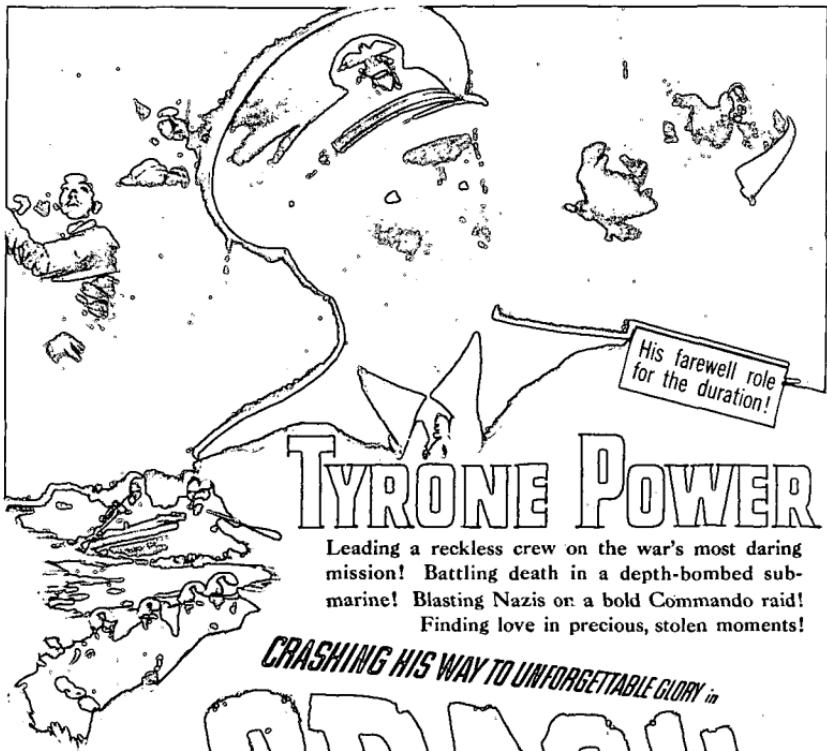
A BLIND LADY

by Brett Halliday

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20th
CENTURY-FOX
PICTURE

Directed by ARCHIE MAYO
Produced by MILTON SPERLING
Screen Play by Jo Swerling · Original Story by W. R. Burnett

APRIL 1985
VOLUME 49
NUMBER 4
ISSN 0026-3621

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MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE, Vol. 49, No. 4, April 1985. Published monthly by Renown Publications, Inc., 18309 Sherman Way, Suite C, Reseda, CA 91335. Subscription: One Year (12 issues) \$18.00; Two Years (24 issues) \$32.00; Canada, One Year \$21.00; Two Years \$38.00; Foreign, One Year \$24.00; Two Years \$40.00 (U.S. Funds Only). Second Class postage paid at Reseda, CA, and at additional mailing offices. Events and characters in this magazine are wholly fictitious. NOTE TO CONTRIBUTORS: All submissions should be sent to the editor at Renown Publications, P.O. Box 178, Reseda, CA 91335. The publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited materials. All manuscripts, photos and artwork must be accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope of sufficient size to return the materials submitted. All material accepted for publication will be paid for at our usual rates. Copyright ©1985 by Renown Publications, Inc. All rights reserved. Protection secured under the International and Pan-American Conventions. Printed in the United States of America. Postmaster — return P.O. Box 178, Reseda, CA 91335.

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MYSTERY MAGAZINE

A DARK NIGHT WITH A BLIND LADY

by Brett Halliday

Mike Shayne was a private eye, and one of the best but he couldn't work miracles. Still, he was determined to pull one off—or die trying!

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Lucy never saw the hand from behind. It reached around her face, and just as she opened her mouth to scream, a meaty palm clamped over it. When she saw the ski mask, she knew what was going to happen!

A Dark Night With A Blind Lady

by BRETT HALLIDAY

SOMEDAY, SOMEWHERE, YOU'RE GOING TO RUN UP against somebody or something even you can't beat. Mike Shayne groaned loudly as he pushed aside the pile of receipts and calculator tape. Had the person who coined that saying also been up against the IRS?

He tossed down another shot of Martell and glanced up at the old ebony wall clock that sat in the shadows of his office. 5:55. Was it really that late?

"Lucy?" called the detective through the open doorway to his secretary.

No answer.

She must have left already. The redhead glanced at his calendar. Friday. Of course, her aerobic dancing session over on the Beach. He lowered his eyes to the scrawls on various pieces of notepaper that represented his daily log. Wasn't it about this time each year that he told himself he was going to keep better records? He was going to have to learn not to make promises he wasn't able to keep.

Starting now. This year he was going to sort through his bills and receipts, then present them to his accountant in something more organized than a cardboard box. First, January.

He heard a creak. The door into Lucy's office had opened. Shayne stood up. Lucy had left before closing and must have decided not to lock it. Who was out there?

LUCY HAMILTON THREW THE TOWEL AROUND HER NECK and stepped outside into the dusk. An in-betweener. Just warm enough to convince her not to shower till she got home, just cold enough so she could feel her muscles tighten beneath the dried sweat.

The street lights were already on as she walked down the health spa's steps and towards the parking lot. She found herself unconsciously humming one of the top forty tunes they had worked out to and thinking about Eric Blackwood. Usually the class was led by a blonde named Missy Koehn, but when she had called in sick, Eric, the new manager, had left the weight room to an assistant and taken over the dance class as though he had been doing it all his life.

Now where did she park? Under the D lightpole. Delightful. That was a good way to describe Eric. Just out of college, good sense of humor, curly black hair and . . . Stop it, she told herself. He's a kid, younger than you are, Lucy, and besides there's Mike. Think what he's meant to you over the years.

She winced involuntarily and had to stop. The pain rose up in her chest again. Maybe it was too soon to resume strenuous activity after the accident. Accident, hell. Her car had been run off the road because she was trying to show Michael she was capable of being more than a private secretary and lover, and she had nearly died because of it. Now when she considered their relationship, the pain, physical and otherwise, took up a large section of the credit column.

She had just straightened up when the hand appeared on her shoulder.

SHAYNE STEPPED INTO THE OUTER OFFICE, HIS HAND starting toward the small of his back where the Smith & Wesson had almost become an extra appendage.

Then he saw her. An attractive woman. Not beautiful, not pretty, not cute, just attractive. She was short, with hair that seemed sort of blonde, sort of permed. A little flat-chested and with a face that appeared made up by an amateur play group. The eyes were her strength. Deep-set and wide-open, they seemed to hold him. A handkerchief in her hand suggested she had been crying, but the weirdest part to the redhead was he had seen her before, somewhere.

"My name is Mike Shayne," he said.

"I know. I've seen your face in the papers."

Papers. That was it. Something this last year. "Your face is familiar, too."

"Unfortunately." She sat down on the old office couch that he had been promising to get reupholstered, but never did. "Do you have any coffee?"

Shayne looked at the Proctor-Silex behind Lucy's desk. It was cleaned and awaiting the next morning's work. "No, but I can fix you some."

She stood up. "It's a bad time. I shouldn't have come in the first place. It's just that as I drove down Flagler I knew I had to do something, and I promised myself I'd stop here or at the Catholic church, whichever came first. You see, I need a miracle."

Suddenly where he had seen her face before came to the private investigator.

"In fourteen hours," she continued, "my brother is to be electrocuted."

LUCY HAMILTON SPUN QUICKLY. HER RIGHT HAND slapped loose the grabbing paw just as she had been taught in self-defense class.

"I knew you could dance, but karate too," said a deep voice.

The brunette felt immediately embarrassed. "Eric," she said with surprise. "What . . ."

Her temporary dance instructor held up a green and white gym bag. She recognized it as the one Michael had bought her for her last birthday.

"I must have forgotten it."

"Happens all the time. I thought I could catch you before you got away."

She smiled, feeling her pulse rate start to drop, then accelerate. She took the bag quickly, a sense of embarrassment replacing the previous emotion, and threw the strap over her shoulder. "Thanks."

"You been taking classes from us for a long time?" he said.

His eyes were blue, she noticed. "Less than a month. I was in the hospital for a while and needed to get back in shape."

"Nothing serious, I hope."

"Just . . ." She stopped herself. Somehow she felt she could tell him everything just as easily as one might confess to a priest.

"You have any trouble with your target heart range?"

"Oh, no," she laughed, feeling a little self-conscious. "I guess I'd better go."

"O.K. If I'm lucky, Missy'll call in sick Monday and I'll see you again."

"Maybe. Thanks again." She started for her car. She had taken less than a dozen steps when she stopped and turned. Eric Blackwood was disappearing into the health club. How nice it was to meet a man who didn't hit upon you, who didn't want something.

"EATON, ISN'T IT?" SAID SHAYNE. "PHILIP EATON."

"And I'm Gloria. Actually my father named me Glorianna, but . . ."

"Your brother just had his last appeal turned down by the Supreme Court."

"Yes, and the Governor says he will not under any circumstances intervene."

Shayne grabbed Lucy's chair and straddled it directly across from the semi-blonde. "I'm no expert on your brother's troubles. I just know what I read in the papers. Pardon me for saying this, but it seemed a fairly open and shut case of murder. He was there and all the witnesses claimed he killed the girl."

Her eyes hovered above her handkerchief reaching out, trying to ensnare him. "Are you doing anything important for the next day, Mr. Shayne?"

The redhead looked at the stack of receipts on his desk. "Nothing that couldn't wait a while." He wondered if he were more interested in her problem or in avoiding his yearly bout with his accountant.

"Good. Then you're taking the case?"

"I didn't exactly say that. I don't know what I could discover in less than a day that was missed in two years' worth of trials and investigations."

"I've got just the starting place for you." She opened her purse. "Let me show you this."

The sharp ring of the telephone directly behind him caused Shayne to jump. He picked up the receiver. "Hello."

"Michael?"

"Angel?"

"Yes."

"Where are you?"

"Fit and Trim You," she said.

"All this time I thought you were exercising you'd really gone back to college."

"Don't try and be funny, Michael."

"Something wrong?" Out of the corner of his eye he caught Gloria Eaton staring at him disconcertedly.

"The car won't start."

"You want me to come get you?"

"Please. I'm still haven't got my strength back from . . ."

"Say no more," said Shayne, a twinge of guilt reverberating through his lanky frame. "I'll be right there."

"No hurry. I'll be at the health bar."

"Sloshed on papaya juice by the time I get there."

SHE GIGGLED AND HUNG UP.

"Lucy," came a familiar voice.

She turned to see Eric Blackwood. He had changed from his sweat clothes, and the happy-go-lucky smile had vanished.

"How did you know my name?" she said.

He pointed to the bag at her feet. LUCY HAMILTON stood out in bold red script.

"Is there something wrong?"

"I've got to shut this place up. I just got a call . . ." He noticed her face change expressions. "Did I say something wrong?"

"Not really. It's just that my car's not working."

"I'd give you a lift any other time."

"No need."

"You could call a cab?"

"I suppose so, but I just talked to . . . my boss, and he said he'll be right over."

"You sure now?"

His concern seemed genuine, she thought as she picked up her bag. She wished she had showered. "No, I'll wait in the car. I can always go across the street and grab a bite."

"You sure?" he repeated.

"Certainly," she smiled. "I mean this is Collins Avenue. What could happen to me here?"

They walked out of Fit and Trim You together. He turned left, she right. "See you Monday," he called.

"Monday it is," she said.

In the fifteen minutes since she had last been outside the temperature had dropped. She stopped, opened her bag, and pulled out the hot-pink sweatjacket that matched her pants. Zipping it up, she continued across the already-cool tarmac toward the rear of the spa. Her little Toyota seemed to be leaning lonely against the solitary lamppost in the parking lot in the classic pose of a hooker.

She had just unlocked the car when she heard the footsteps. She stood up and looked around.

Nothing but the wind. Maybe it had blown the sound of a distant walker toward her. She tossed the bag in the rear. Collins seemed unusually deserted. Well, the snowbirds and the retirees usually ate early. It was one of the ways of insuring a table.

She hesitated in the doorway. Maybe she should wait across the street. No, she decided. She wouldn't be able to see Michael when he arrived.

She never saw the hand from behind. It reached around her face, and just as her mouth opened to scream, a meaty palm clamped over it. The back door to her car was opened and she was flung in.

When she saw the ski mask, she knew what was going to happen.

II

SHAYNE TOOK THE PHOTOGRAPH FROM GLORIA EATON. Of the six figures, the investigator recognized only one. Philip Eaton's gaunt face had been plastered across the Miami papers almost daily since the trial while a seemingly endless series of appeals to the Florida Supreme Court and federal courts was denied. In the color picture, though, his face was rounder, his hair immaculately styled, and instead of drab Florida State Prison denim, he had on a white tuxedo. Four distinguished men, all slightly older and also wearing tuxes, surrounded him. A beautiful blonde in a diaper smiled as she knelt in front of them. The only thing across her chest was a sash proclaiming WELCOME 1982.

"I found this in Philip's den this afternoon," explained the woman. "I was over there talking to his wife, Marlene. The woman has been a basket case since the trial. All she'll say is, 'Philip couldn't do something like that.' Anyway, while we were talking, I was sort of absentmindedly flipping through the books behind his desk. That picture fell out of one of those Ludlum thrillers, *The Acquitaine Progression*."

Shayne continued to study the picture. "Do you know who these other four men are?"

"A couple. I think I met the Commander Whitehead-type on the far right. Yes, Ellis Winters. I was introduced to him at a party a year ago at Crossed Flags."

"What's that?"

"A yacht club in Bal Harbour that Philip was invited to join the year after he grossed his first million."

"You said a couple?"

"Oh yes. The bald-headed guy with the mustache and the gleam in his eye is Jarvis Stead."

"The boatmaker."

"The same. Philip did some work for him, and Jarvis put him up for membership."

"The others?"

"I'm sorry. Maybe Marlene would know."

"What about asking Philip himself?"

"Philip won't talk to anybody. Ever since nobody would believe him at the trial, he's gone into sheer depression."

Shayne lit up a Camel. "I'm a little hazy about the trial. What do you mean nobody believed him?"

She wound her pale fingers tightly around the handkerchief. "Philip testified that he didn't kill Sylvia Burke."

Shayne held up his hands. "Wait a minute. From what I can recall, the prosecution had a confession before they went to trial."

"You're partly right. The night of the murder Philip gave the MBPD a confession. He admitted that he had strangled and beaten her." She dabbed her eyes with the handkerchief. "But then when the trial started, he suddenly changed his story. Claimed that while he was in the house, he was in another room when the girl was killed. Said he had had too much to drink and had passed out. He said he couldn't even remember giving the police a confession. His lawyer, Chad Binghamton, tried everything from tainted evidence to temporary insanity. But nothing worked. Then in the middle of the trial Philip dropped the bombshell."

"The bombshell?"

"That he had been put up to the whole thing. That he didn't do the killing."

"Then who did?"

"He didn't know. He suspected one of the other people in the house that night. Unfortunately, there was no evidence that anybody else was in the house then, and so he looked even guiltier, making up some last-minute story to save his life."

"I don't recall any names. Who did he claim where the other people

in the house that night?"

"That's just it. Philip has a funny sense of honor. Since he couldn't be certain of who killed the girl, he said he didn't want to drag the other people into the mess."

"A strange honor indeed." The detective inhaled deeply, but the usually relaxing smoke seemed unduly harsh. "But *you* think that maybe the people in this picture are the group he wouldn't finger?"

"It's a long shot, but what else do I have to go on? I mean, Sylvia Burke was a notorious party girl, and here's my brother with another party girl, the blonde in the sash. There could be a connection."

Shayne's eyes swept across his watch. Lucy. He had clean forgotten about her. He looked up into a face that begged for hope. "I have to be honest with you. You haven't given me much to go on. Is there anything else, perhaps something more substantial?"

"For two years Chad and I have sniffed out every trail. Nothing. This just seemed to be maybe . . . well." She covered her face with her hands and began to sob. Suddenly she paused. "My brother's innocent. I know he is."

"Easy," said the redhead. He took her by the hand and helped her up. "If you'll leave the photograph and some other information, I'll look into the situation immediately."

AS HE CROSSED THE TUTTLE CAUSEWAY, THE REDHEAD didn't know which he felt worse about—leaving Lucy in the lurch or hastily ushering a desperate woman out of his office. He looked down at his Seiko. 6:44. How long had Lucy been waiting?

Every traffic light seemed determined to make it longer. Since he had climbed into the Buick, he had had this sixth sense that something was wrong with his secretary. Why, he couldn't rationally explain, but the hairs on the back of his neck were starting to bristle.

He turned on to Collins. In thirteen hours Philip Eaton was scheduled to be electrocuted at Starke, and all he had was a three-year-old picture and the character reference from a biased sister. From what little he could remember about the case, discounting the sensationalism surrounding it, the whole matter had been pretty open and shut. Tampa Bay had a better shot at the Super Bowl than he did of performing a miracle for her.

Maybe he had been out in the streets too long, but something about her story didn't ring true. Wasn't it awfully lucky that a scant few hours before the execution she had just happened to tumble across a new lead?

A block away from the health spa he spotted the flashing blue and

red lights. As he slid the Buick up to the curb and jumped out, he saw Lucy's green Toyota still sitting under the parking lot light. A noisy ambulance was just starting to pull away.

He ran toward the small gathering of elderly citizens. "What happened?" he called out to a uniformed cop who was starting to encircle the area with yellow tape.

"A woman was attacked," said the cop without stopping.

"Who?"

"Hang on, fella," said the policeman's partner from the side. "What's your interest?"

"That car belongs to my secretary."

"Brunette? Pretty?"

"Yeah."

The cop looked up at some moths excitedly circling the lamp post. "If I were you, I'd get over to Mercy Hospital. Somebody got your secretary real bad."

III

THE SHORT, HEAVY-SET NURSE POINTED DOWN AT THE floor. "You so much as get your toes over that white line, Red, and I'll bust your chops before calling security."

It would have been easier to penetrate a Dolphins' goal-line stand, Shayne decided, than to get by BUCKETT, LUCILLE, R.N. "I want to know something about the brunette who was just brought in."

"Listen, fella, this is an E.R., not the browsing room of your local library. Behind Curtain #1 I got a kid having his stomach Electroluxed of a suspected controlled substance. Curtain #2 hides a senior citizen who stuck his arm out to hail a cab and got it severed by a drunk driver. Curtain #3 offers the real showcase . . ."

"I get the picture."

A hint of warmth curled the sharp edges of her mouth. "Look, mister, I know you're worried. You go sit down over there, and I'll call you."

The tall investigator walked over to the coffee machine. The syrupy joe couldn't have left a more cardboard taste if he had eaten a cereal box.

"Excuse me," said a soft voice behind him.

Shayne turned to see an elderly man in a green cardigan. "I heard you talking to the nurse. About the young lady . . ."

"What do you know?" The redhead was embarrassed at how harsh he sounded.

"I had just gone for the car to pick up the missus after dinner across

the street. I spotted some commotion and looked into the parking lot. This man was trying to push the young lady into the back of a car. I admit I was afraid. I locked my doors, held my horn down, and started circling them. When that didn't do much, I started flashing my lights in his face. Anything to get attention to what was happening."

"I appreciate what you did, Mr. . . ."

"Somers, Harold Somers."

"Did you get a look at the man's face?"

"I'm afraid not. He was wearing one of those ski-mask things."

"What did he do when he saw you?"

"Stopped and stared, stopped and stared. Even from inside that locked car, I don't mind telling you I was scared. All I could see in his eyes was burning hate. I hope she's O.K."

"Thanks," said Shayne, extending his hand. The gentleman had shown a lot more bravery and concern than men half his age and twice his size.

THE REDHEAD WAS POURING HIS SECOND CUP OF CARD-board down the cylindrical ashtray beside him when he saw he had company. "Hello, Caron," he said to the female cop.

The MBPD lieutenant plopped down into the seat beside him. She was wearing a tattered pair of sweats that smelled of the locker room. "What's the word on Lucy?"

"Nothing," he said slowly. Crumpling the cup in his meaty palm, he looked Caron Thurman in the eye and growled. "Does the dispatcher have orders to inform you every time something happens to me or my secretary?"

She shifted her muscular body. "Something like that. A code 412—how bad is it?"

Shayne envied the way she was able to take refuge behind the number. "I don't know yet. I got there too late, and now these people here won't let me see her."

"You're not your sister's keeper, Mike." She lit a cigarette and handed it to the detective. "Suck on this while I flash my badge and see what turns up."

Shayne watched as the policewoman moved agilely across the corridor and cornered a still-busy Nurse Bucket. Their conversation was animated—and brief.

"Damn," said Caron Thurman as she returned to the vacant seat, "that broad is no lady. You wouldn't believe what she told me I could do with my gold shield." She paused. "No, that's anatomically impossible."

They sat together in silence amidst the din of the E.R. Shayne was no stranger to violence and bloodshed. They were part of his life, he admitted—hell, a big part. But when they got too close, when they entered a private room, he recoiled.

Without speaking he began to study the woman beside him. Even the sloppy sweatshirt couldn't hide her well-developed frame. Somehow he felt a certain assurance in having the homicide detective there in this time of crisis. Since she had come on the force as a new Vice officer two years ago, she had pursued him relentlessly—sometimes jokingly, sometimes seriously, always unashamedly. But she had pursued criminals with an even greater passion.

She had earned her gold shield and an assignment in homicide, and, yeah, she had earned his respect—and more.

"Hey, Red," came the raspy voice.

"Buckett," said Shayne, jumping to his feet. "What's up?"

"Follow me," said the nurse.

As they passed a portable oxygen tent with an elderly man beneath it, Shayne said, "She's alive?"

"Yes."

The next question had lurked on the fringes of consciousness for over an hour before he was able to ask it. "Was she . . ."

Buckett answered bluntly. "She wasn't raped, if that's what you mean."

Shayne nodded. The knot in his gut was no less tight. How many times had he criticized a husband or boyfriend of an assaulted woman for worrying more about her sexual sanctity than her physical well-being? But he couldn't deny that he had been momentarily victimized by the same misplaced set of values.

Buckett rapped his chest with her clipboard. "You got thirty seconds—no more—to go behind this curtain and see Ms. Hamilton."

"Thanks." Shayne drew a deep breath. Stepping around the corner, he steeled himself.

She lay motionless beneath the sheet. A tube ran beneath her nostrils, and another had pierced an exposed forearm. Even under the crisscrossing layers of white gauze, her face appeared red and bruised. Acid niagared down his stomach. The cop on the scene had been right.

Lightly he touched her pallid skin with his finger. It was cold and dry.

In response her eyelids slit open, and her pupils rolled towards him.

The scream that emerged from between her puffed lips was inhuman and interminable.

IV

SHAYNE RECHECKED THE WATER-LINE OF THE DARK bottle. The Martell was nearly gone. He threw down another shot, barely feeling the burning cognac sliding down his esophagus. Through half-open lids he stared at his Seiko. Moisture must have seeped in under the crystal, for the numbers were blurred.

"You want to talk about it, Mike?" said the scarecrow figure from across the room.

Shayne tried to focus on his long-time reporter friend from the *Daily News*. This wasn't the first time he had sought out Tim Rourke's apartment for booze and a sounding board. In the past Rourke had usually been the prescription he needed. No, he wasn't a shoulder to cry on—he was more the right uppercut of reality. The journalist had a way of avoiding the sentimentality people listened for and getting out the truth they needed to hear. "I should have been there for her," Shayne slurred.

"First of all, shamus," said Rourke, throwing down a splash of Irish whiskey from a spotted jelly glass, "you're Lucy's close friend, not her bodyguard. Secondly, she doesn't want you to be there every second. You know yourself that the only time you two have had real problems has been when you tried to run her life."

"Come on, Tim, if you care for somebody . . . but what would *you* know about that . . ."

"Wait just a damned minute, Mike." Rourke slammed down the glass. "When did you become such a wheeler-dealer you cornered the market on concern?"

Shayne rose to his feet. "What are you trying to do to me?" He took a wobbly step toward his friend before he knew the answer to his own question. His face and shoulders dropped. "All I did was barely touch her hand."

"I know."

"I can't get her scream out of my head."

Rourke pulled out the kitchen chair and held it while the redhead sat down. "What do the doctors say, Mike?"

"A Dr. Craig told me that physically she's going to be O.K. No broken bones, nothing torn, no muscle or nerve damage. Won't even need plastic surgery."

"And . . ."

"Mentally, who can predict? The staff psychologist was going to talk with her when she was up to it, but the word is cases like hers are hard to figure. Sometimes the victim recovers completely from the trauma.

But sometimes." He pulled out a pack of cigarettes from his shirt pocket. It was empty. He crushed and tossed it at the sink.

Rourke waited, then said, "You know her scream wasn't directed at you personally. Was this Dr. Craig a woman?"

"Yeah. How did . . . ?"

"They often are in an assault case on a woman. The victim develops a total resentment of men. That's one of the things a psychologist will deal with. Can you see her again soon?"

"They're going to let me know when the time is right."

"Updates?"

"Craig told me to call whenever I wanted, but to get lost tonight." Shayne picked up a butt from the cereal bowl he had been using as an ashtray. He stuck the stub between his teeth. The flame was hot and burned the tip of his nose. "It doesn't seem fair," he said, spitting out the remains.

"I seem to remember a certain prominent Miami detective telling a certain disreputable newspaperman a few times that you've got to play the cards you're dealt, make the best of it."

"Don't feed me clichés."

"Man does not survive by steak and onions—or Martell—alone."

Shayne looked down at the cognac bottle. It was empty and so was he. "Maybe I'd better get going. Where's my coat?"

"In the shape you're in, shamus, you're spending the night at the Motel Rourke."

Not paying any attention, the redhead fumbled for his blue sport coat. As he grabbed it, a photograph fell to the floor. Rourke bent over and picked it up for him. "What's this?"

"Oh, jeez! I completely forgot."

"Forgot what?"

"A new client."

The reporter glanced at the picture. "One of these bluebloods has climbed down from Mt. Olympus to hire you?"

"Yeah," said Shayne, trying to stick his right hand in his right sleeve. "You know these jokers?"

"It would be hard to make my appointed rounds among our fair city's upper crust without running into some of these people. Now, the blonde, her I don't know, but I'd sure have liked to welcome in '82 with her."

Shayne felt a sense of purpose jolt him like caffeine never could. "I've had Philip Eaton, Ellis Winters, and Jarvis Stead pointed out to me. What about the other two?"

"The guy in the middle with the wavy white hair and hand on the

blonde's tush is the Honorable Sidney Butler."

"The hanging judge. Wait a minute," said Shayne, momentarily parting the fog, "he didn't preside at Eaton's trial, did he?"

"No. Why?"

"Just a theory, but one about as bad as I feel."

"This other guy next to Eaton, the one in the gray suit, is appropriately a banker. Hollis Wycliffe, President of 'the bank with a heart,' Sunshine Federal."

"Off the top of your head, can you think of any connection between all the people in the picture?"

Rourke sat back and closed his eyes. "All hoi-polloi, except the girl. She's probably at the opposite end of the social ladder. A few are Chamber of Commerce, a few I think worked on some civic committees, but nothing public I can recall. Of course, they might have something going privately like an investment group."

"Thanks," said Shayne, finding the left sleeve easier than the right.

"Not that I'm prying but . . ."

"The hell you're not."

"O.K., honesty compels me to admit the old bloodhound nose is going crazy. Now you don't have to answer, but this wouldn't have something to do with Eaton's imminent execution, would it?"

"You know, Tim, if it had been Woodward and Rourke, you might have broken Watergate months earlier."

"That's a great way not to answer my question," said the reporter, continuing to stare at the photograph in his hand.

His coat finally on, Shayne stood up. "I'm going."

"Let me at least drive you home."

"I'm not going home."

"Where to, sir?"

"I'm not sure about that. Give me some time to think."

"Wait a minute," said Rourke. He walked over to a desk that was hidden under the weight of old newspaper and dirty clothes. Shoving them off, he turned on a desk lamp and got out a magnifying glass from the drawer. Carefully he examined the picture. "I thought so," he exclaimed.

"Thought what?"

Rourke waved the picture. "If where you're going has anything to do with this, I'd have second thoughts. This photo, I'm pretty sure, is a composite."

"A what?"

"A fake."

V

DESPITE THE AMPLE STREET LIGHTING OF BAL HARBOUR, the night seemed especially pitch-black to the redhead.

"What was that address your client gave you again?" Rourke said across the front seat of Shayne's Buick.

Blinking his eyes to ward off drowsiness, Shayne said, "What?"

"The address. How do you expect me to chauffeur you to Eaton's estate without it?"

Shayne glanced down at the paper in his hand. A momentary street light illuminated the page. "127. It should be on the left." Rourke slowed down the black car. "This detective work isn't as exciting as it's cracked up to be."

"Don't worry. By the time the case appears in one of those stories you write, I'll bet you'll be able to dress it up."

"Yeah, I do have a way with words, don't I?"

The Buick came to an abrupt halt.

"What the . . .," said Shayne.

"There's a limo in the drive." Rourke parked the Buick across the street from it.

Shayne peered toward the mansion. A figure in a dark-suit and a shadowed face came down the walk and got in. Slowly the limo pulled out the opposite end of the circular drive. As it turned on to the street, the redhead could barely make out its license. Mechanically he withdrew his notepad and copied down the numbers and letters.

"Why'd you do that?" said the reporter.

"Instinct." When you knew nothing, anything was valuable.

They sat outside the house for a few minutes in silence. Lights from the windows stayed on.

After a while, Shayne said, "You wait here."

"No offense, Mike, but I think I'd better go with you. The way you smell and look, the lady might get the wrong idea. This neighborhood doesn't exactly look like a paradise for midnight panhandlers."

"O.K." The cool night air attacked the redhead's senses, jolting him awake.

When they reached the front door, Shayne knocked.

Nobody answered.

He knocked again.

Still no answer.

"Maybe she's gone to bed," said Rourke.

"With all the lights on, and besides, somebody was just here."

"Suppose she's not at home and left the lights on for security reasons."

"Good point, Watson, but between that phony photograph and the urgency of Eaton's situation, I don't feel like waiting around to see if she comes home or down to greet us. Let's take a look-see."

They slipped behind some palmetto and, hearing a flapping noise, wandered around back. Across a stone-covered patio they saw a half-opened set of French doors with a curtain being smacked against them by the breeze.

Even though he wasn't operating on all eight cylinders, the rawboned redhead realized something was wrong.

"Something's rotten in the estate of Eaton," said Rourke, echoing the detective's thoughts. "What now?"

"We go in."

"I think they call that Breaking & Entering."

"Then let's just pretend Mrs. Eaton invited us. After all, she did leave the doors open." It was more than the night air that was waking the investigator up.

THE DOORS OPENED INTO WHAT THE REDHEAD DECIDED was probably Eaton's den. A stack of magazines about computers had built up on one table. Beside it sat a box of mail. Not a speck of dust was visible. a well-kept shrine, Shayne thought, deciding it must have been the room his client had described as where she had found the photograph.

Spotting a desk, he walked behind it and stared at a small bookcase. His eyes scanned the titles quickly, but he couldn't find a Ludlum. He looked around. Most of the books dealt with marketing, economics, computer technology and the like. Not a single piece of fiction.

"What are you looking for, shamus?"

"A book."

"Careful. You'll spoil your reputation as a man of the streets."

Shayne ignored the jibe. "Eaton's sister said she found the photograph in *The Aquitaine Progression*."

Rourke straightened up. "And she suggested that her brother had left the photograph in the book?"

"Yeah."

"If you needed any more proof that the photograph's a phony, you just got it."

"What do you mean?"

"Eaton has been incarcerated at Starke since early '82, right?"

"Yeah."

"Then it would be difficult for him to put a photo in a novel that wasn't published until 1984."

"No bad, Watson. Since you're on a roll, why do you think she'd go to so much trouble to lie to me?"

Rourke sat down on the couch and began to scratch his chin. "Well, you said she was desperate. Maybe she just thought she could use you as a rock in the middle of a hornet's nest. I just told you, shamus, you've got a pretty good reputation around town. She could have figured that at best you'd turn something up. At least, the very fact you were nosing around the case might be enough to buy some valuable time for her brother."

"Maybe one last appeal. But why the photo?"

"As I recall, Eaton gave an impassioned plea at his trial's end that unnamed others were behind the whole thing. Maybe his sister thought that the four big wheels were the ones to whom he referred."

"Maybe Marlene Eaton can help us."

"I'll lay odds that she doesn't know squat about this photograph."

"Yeah, but she might know something about some of the people in it."

Rourke drummed his fingers on a coffee table. "I don't mind admitting this whole situation makes me nervous. If it's all the same to you, let's wait outside."

"We don't have the time."

"Look, if she were here, she'd have heard us by now."

"I guess you're right, but I've got an uneasy feeling. Come on."

As Shayne held the curtain back for his friend, his eye instinctively took one last look around the room.

A tough case suddenly got tougher.

Protruding from behind the couch Rourke had been sitting was a bracelet arm.

VI

CARON THURMAN STOOD UP FROM BEHIND THE COUCH. She was wearing the same sweatsuit that she had earlier in the evening, but her I.D. hung from the jacket zipper. "It's just not your night, is it, Mike?"

The tiredness gone, Shayne said, "She hasn't been dead long, has she?"

"No. I'd say from the skin color, the body temperature, an hour maybe. What time did you find her this way?"

The investigator pulled back his sleeve. "11:48."

Rourke volunteered, "After we called you we searched the house. Nobody here, not even in the servants' quarters."

"I think she had to get rid of them," said the lady cop. "With all the

appeals she's gone through, even a million dollars can dry up quickly."

"I think she knew her killer," said the reporter.

"Oh?" said Thurman.

"Sure. There's a knot the size of the shamus's fist on the left side of her forehead. She had to be facing him."

"Tim's got this Watson complex," said Shayne, reminding the policewoman that his friend was also his chronicler.

Caron Thurman put both hands on her hips. "Number one, her killer was not necessarily a man. Number two, with the knot where it is, she could have just fallen against anything, but we won't know that till the lab boys check all the hard objects in the immediate vicinity for flesh, blood, body oil, etc., and the M.E. does an autopsy. Number three, if she were killed, she could have been spun around by a killer and hit. Were these doors open when you arrived?"

"Yes," admitted a put-in-his-place Rourke.

"It's not his fault," said Shayne. "When Tim had to recuperate from mononucleosis a few summers ago, he read all of Agatha Christie."

Caron Thurman walked over to where the redhead was sitting on the arm of a chair and brushed some loose strands of hair out of his eyes. "You look terrible."

"No worse than I feel. You got any leads on the guy who attacked Lucy?"

"Not yet. We're waiting to talk to her."

"In the meantime, try Harold Somers."

"Who's he? I don't remember his name on the paperwork."

"One of those people the media likes to pigeonhole as a senior citizen. He spotted the whole thing happening and probably saved Lucy's life by frightening off the guy."

She unzipped a pocket and pulled out a notebook. "Spell me that name again."

"Could be S-O-M-E-R-S or S-U-M-M-E-R-S. He told me that he and his wife ate across the street, so he probably lives in the vicinity."

"I'll check it out as soon as I can."

"Have you heard anything else about Lucy?"

"No, but when I do, I'll give you a call immediately." Her eyes fastened on his. "You O.K.?"

"Yeah, I got some work to keep me busy."

"I knew there was a reason you weren't hanging around Mercy."

"Can I give you a statement later? Tim was with me the whole way."

"Sure, but . . ."

"I've got a lead."

"I'm not asking you to violate client confidentiality, but do you think your lead might help me solve what happened here tonight? I mean, I was the first detective here, so I catch it."

"It might."

"Then, let me make you an offer you can't refuse," she said with a semi-smile that was more than professional.

"I'm one step ahead of you. Sure, I'll help you with this one, and you get me the guy who attacked Lucy."

"I don't like the sound of that, Mike."

"You've got good reason not to," he said as he left.

IT WAS SHORTLY AFTER 1:00 A.M. WHEN SHAYNE FOUND the address that Gloria Eaton had filled in for him before she had left his office. Coconut Grove was nearly deserted, a far cry from a few years ago when the Hare Krishnas and hippies seem to have acquired squatters' rights in Peacock Park. "A rich person's ghetto," the Mayor, who also lived here, had called it. Shayne pulled up in front of the townhouse apartment. Well, she might not be like her brother, a candidate for *Forbes* Fabulous 400, but she seemed to be doing well.

She also seemed to be up. A light shown from the second-floor window, and he could see shadows moving. As he reached the door, before knocking he stuck his ear against it. Loud voices came from within. He knocked.

All grew silent, but no one appeared. This time the redhead rang the doorbell. Chimes played the first few bars of "Moon River." Still no answer.

This was not the night to be fooling around with Mike Shayne, he decided. He tore off the end of a match-book cover. Wedging it in the doorbell, he silently made book that no one was going to spend the night listening to a chimed version of "Moon River."

In less than five minutes the door opened, and he was standing face to face with a Hispanic cowboy, complete with leather boots, designer jeans, and a fringed shirt. "It is very late," said the short figure.

"Tell the lady, Tex, that the P.I. she hired is here to talk."

"Come back tomorrow."

"Hey, what I said wasn't an invitation—it was an order."

"Get lost." The short man started to shut the door.

Shayne's front kick surprised the Hispanic. It struck the door, knocking the man back into a dimly-lit living room. The redhead came through the opening quickly.

The Hispanic was waiting in the classic martial arts pose of a karate expert. One foot ahead of the other, one fist pointed forward, the other

at his side.

"Bruce Lee's dead, pal," said the detective. "You start something you can't finish, and you're gonna join him in that great dojo in the sky."

His opponent took two steps toward him and leaped. As Shayne jumped aside, a boot came so close to his head that he could see small red dragons etched into the heel.

The Hispanic regained his feet and immediately threw a couple of back kicks.

Shayne blocked one. His forearm stung. The boots must have been steel plated. He picked up an oak chair.

A foot lashed out, instantly converting the furniture to firewood.

The investigator knew his opponent was not only quick, but powerful. The shadows played off the Hispanic's figure, making him difficult to follow.

Shayne picked up a book and frisbeed it toward the only table lamp on.

The room went dark.

Shayne, having expected it, immediately threw a rolling block at the Hispanic. He caught the surprised and stationary figure in the knees and sprawled him backward.

Keep contact, he told himself as he rolled to one knee. He rammed his elbow forward and up.

He felt the figure's chin snap back, and he heard the sound of teeth cracking.

The Hispanic screamed in pain, further telling the redhead where he was. Getting to his feet, Shayne pointed his knee and kicked. The howl was an obvious indicator his opponent was going to have to put up with blood in his urine for a couple of days.

His eyes getting accustomed to the dark, he spotted the agonized face and drove home a right-left combination.

Suddenly light flooded the room.

Shayne immediately noticed two things. The Hispanic was unconscious and standing at the top of the winding staircase were two people. Gloria Eaton and a man in a three-piece brown suit.

"Mr. Shayne," said his client calmly, "you're fired."

VII

"IF YOU WANTED TO FIRE ME, LADY," SAID SHAYNE, "A simple word would have been enough, and you would have saved Tex over there a trip to the orthodontist."

The figure standing beside her said, "I must apologize for my man's

over-aggressiveness. Sometimes Carlos, being Panamanian, doesn't understand English as well as he should."

"Don't worry," said the detective, wiping the blood from his knuckles with a handkerchief, "I spoke to him in an international language. Now, the lady I know, but who are you, pal?"

Gloria Eaton unwound down the staircase. She was wearing a white silk caftan. "Mr. Shayne, this is Philip's and my lawyer."

"Chad Binghamton," said the athletic figure, following her.

"Enchanted," said the investigator. As sure as the sun would rise in a few hours over Miami, there was more between the two than a basic lawyer-client relationship.

"Mr. Shayne," she said, her voice somewhere between tears and an apology, "I've been trying to reach you all night. Chad's convinced me I made a terrible mistake. Do you know what I'm talking about?"

"The picture."

The attorney interrupted. "Mr. Shayne, I would hope you wouldn't hold Gloria's enthusiasm against her. Believe me, she cares about her brother deeply, and she meant well, but her methods were questionable."

Shayne nodded at the unconscious figure on the Oriental rug. "It happens in the best of families." The detective dropped on a white couch that looked as unviolated as the day it had come from some interior decorator's showroom. He lit up a Camel and tossed the match at Carlos. "How did you do the photograph?"

"I found the negatives of some pictures I had taken at Crossed Flags and carefully cut out some of Philip's friends . . ."

"Gloria," interrupted her lawyer, "is really quite good as a photographer. Upstairs she has a darkroom."

Shayne would have bet the dark room that concerned the lawyer had a bed in it. As she reached for the lamp he had knocked over, the redhead noticed what looked liked dark ink stains on the back of the caftan. "I think you overestimated my P.R. value to your case."

Gloria Eaton wouldn't look at the investigator. "Forgive me. I realize now it's too late. There's nothing I can do to save my brother."

Shayne said, "Do you still believe he's innocent?"

"I want to, but . . ."

"Then," continued the detective, "don't be ashamed about what you did. Justice is a blind lady who sometimes needs to be nudged towards the truth."

"That's quite Machiavellian of you, Shayne," said Binghamton.

"That's why I'm a detective and you're a lawyer," answered the redhead.

"Oh, I nearly forgot," she said. "Chad, would you pay Mr. Shayne for his time and trouble."

From his suitcoat the athletic figure withdrew a snakeskin passport wallet and handed the detective two \$500 bills. "That should more than cover a couple of hours of your time."

"And your conscience," said Shayne, taking the money.

The lawyer stared at him. "And I'm certain your conscience won't trouble you when you don't claim this cash on your next income tax return."

Shayne stood up. "I said you sometimes have to nudge the blind lady, not mug her. And don't worry, I can find my way out."

As the redhead departed, Binghamton, almost under his breath, said, "Will wonders never cease? A Machiavellian gumshoe gets religion."

DECIDING \$1000 WORTH OF KNUCKLES WAS ENOUGH, Shayne walked into the night air. At other times he might have played his cards differently, but in the back of his head was the image of a woman in a hospital bed, his chief priority. Sure, something didn't ring true about Gloria Eaton and her lawyer's story, but to hell with it. It was almost 1:30, he was tired, and if he were to be ready when Lucy was, he needed some rest.

One obvious question nested in his head. Why hadn't he told Gloria about Marlene Eaton's death? Was it just the fight, the shock at being fired, the irritation with Chad Binghamton? Or, was his unconscious at work? In any case he knew he was more than just a good citizen waiting for the police to make the announcement to next of kin.

As he reached the Buick, he spotted a phone booth across the street. On instinct he crossed the road and dialed his number. When he got his answering machine, he pressed his beeper.

In less than a minute he knew Gloria Eaton had lied about something—there had been no attempt to call him.

He dialed Marlene Eaton's. The previous call had triggered his memory about something he had forgotten. An Officer Day finally put him in touch with Caron Thurman.

"Caron, Mike."

"If it's about Lucy, I haven't heard a thing."

"Thanks, but . . ."

"I'm glad you called. Your man Watson's suspicions were right after all."

"Oh?"

"Marlene Eaton hit her head falling all right, but when we removed her turtleneck, we found bruises on her throat."

"She was strangled."

"Yes," she said, "by a powerful set of hands. Crushed her larynx."

"Can you run a license plate check for me?"

"At this hour?"

"It belongs to the limo that was leaving the scene when Tim and I arrived."

"Why didn't you mention it earlier?"

"I don't know. Maybe it was the tiredness, the cognac . . ."

"Lucy."

He was silent for a second. "Maybe. I'll be in touch."

"One more thing."

"Yeah?"

"Did you see anybody in that limo?"

"A big man got in, but with the shadows, I couldn't see his face."

"A man big enough to crush a larynx?"

"Yeah."

"Mike, where are you off to now?"

"While the evening's still young, I think I'm going to nudge a blind lady."

VIII

SHAYNE CHECKED HIS WATCH. FOR MOST MIAMIANS IT was 2:00 A.M., the middle of the night. But for Jerry King, the city's most flamboyant gentleman of leisure, it was the middle of the business day. Shayne found his friend and sometimes informant parked off Miami Avenue at Rick's Cafe Americain.

As the detective approached the familiar rag-top Cadillac, he noticed a new addition to the King family. Attached to the rear bumper was a silver Air-Stream.

The trailer door opened, and a figure wearing baggy trousers, a wrinkled silver-lame cardigan, a white shirt with a diamond-studded bowtie, and pair of gold-rimmed Ben Franklin glasses stepped out.

Shayne scarcely recognized the plump pimp. "J.K., my man," said the redhead.

"Shhh!" said King, putting a finger to his lips. "Didn't yo Momma teach you to hold it down inside a library?"

"Excuse me," said Shayne, stifling his first laugh of the evening. The detective had a feeling he was about to be introduced to his friend's latest shtick-of-the-month for his street business.

"Step into the bookmobile, and we'll see if we can get something circulating."

Inside Shayne was greeted by King's favorite ladies.

"Michael, bro," said the entrepreneur, "do you see anything you'd like to check out overnight?"

A lady with her hair in a bun and a white blouse that bulged at the broach wiggled up. "Hi, Red, I'm Hester Prynne, and I'd just love to help you earn your very own scarlet letter, if you catch my drift."

Shayne did. "Actually," he explained, "I'm here to talk with your head librarian about his card catalogue." He pulled the retouched photograph from his sport coat and showed it to King. "The blonde—I need to know who she is."

"She's certainly not one of my collection, but maybe we can arrange something through interlibrary loan, if . . ."

"I catch your drift."

"Follow me." King led him back outside, where the pimp opened the trunk to his car. From it he took out a file box marked STEAK. Shayne noticed several other metal cabinets like it in the trunk. Each had a label like HAMBURGER, GROUND CHUCK.

"She's U.S.D.A. prime, Mike," King said. "The first problem is she's not one of mine. Secondly, I don't recognize her. I mean, most prime or choice I've recruited, but Blondie doesn't ring a bell." He rifled through the entire file box. "Sorry, nothing."

"What does that mean? She's out-of-town?"

"Possibly brand new."

"I doubt it. This photo's probably at least two years old."

"Wait a minute." He put the files back, then yanked to another set that was labelled DEAD MEAT. He began sorting through his file cards. Suddenly he yanked one out. "Bad news, Mike. Blondie's was overdue."

"Overdue?"

"She's dead. About a year and a half ago. Beaten, then strangled. They fished little Joanie Valin out of the Bay."

Shayne drew a deep breath. "Who was her employer?"

"Marty Bagel."

"Who?"

"Marty Baglinsky. Operates over on the Beach. Fontainebleau crowd. Nothing but trouble."

"What do you mean?"

"The man be vicious. He keeps his girls in line the hard way."

Something triggered in Shayne's mind. "Tell me, what kind of things do guys like him do now?"

"Nothing to scar the merchandise. Damaged goods are useless. A lit cigarette to an unseen area. Coat hangers wrapped in newspaper. Cattle prods are . . ."

"Thanks," said Shayne. "Where could I find him?"

"This time of night. Try the Buccaneer, but don't tell him I sent you."

Martha, one of King's ladies, sauntered over. "Hi, my name's Cleopatra." She pulled her v-neck blouse down. "Would you care to flip through my pages?"

"No thanks, Cleo," said the redhead as he started towards the Buick. "I might make an asp of myself."

THE NIGHT CLERK AT THE BUCCANEER RESPONDED TO Shayne's cash the way he did to all Bagel's customers. He made a quick phone call, then said, "Suite 900."

Shayne took the elevator up to the ninth floor and knocked. A guy with a size 48 coat and smaller I.Q. opened up.

"Hey, Bonzo," said the detective, "take me to your trainer."

"What's your business, jack?"

"And I didn't think you'd remember my name." He brushed by.

"Hold it," commanded the doorman.

A round figure in a silk smoking jacket and a clay pipe appeared in front of Shayne. "It's O.K., Harvey." He studied the redhead. "You look kinda familiar."

"You gonna ask me my sign next, pal?"

"Marty Bagel don't play no games. What do you want?"

In the background Shayne heard Bill Haley and the Comets playing "Rock Around the Clock." It wasn't his night for music either, he decided as he pulled out one of the \$500 bills. "Will this buy me a first-stringer?"

"For maybe an hour."

"You must have a stable of all-pros." He shook his head. "Things have sure changed since I was in town the last time."

"When was that?"

"About two years ago."

"That must be where I remember you from," said Baglinsky. He pulled out a small, black-leather book. "What's your name?"

"Smith, John Smith."

Bagel flashed him a smile through a gold-filled mouth that the redhead decided must have allowed some dentist to retire to the Bahamas. "O.K., John, you got a preference?"

"Let me think what her name was. Uh, blonde, really a knockout. Knew more tricks than Mandrake the Magician. Joan, no Joanie."

"Gee, this is unfortunate," declared the round pimp without looking up. "Miss Valin is no longer in my employ."

"Sheet!" said the redhead. "I'm been dreaming about her back in Cleveland . . . wait a minute," he said, taking a chance. "She had a friend. I really got off on watching them double-team."

Bagel showed more gold than a three-sports Olympic winner. "Oh, you must mean Tammy."

"Tammy, Tammy," said Shayne. "Sounds good to me."

Bagel walked over to a roll-top desk. The music had switched to a falsetto love ballad Fifties-style as the pimp handed him key 919. Shayne gave him the bill.

"Harvey," called the figure in the smoking jacket, "buzz Miss Tammy that Mr. Smith is on the way." He turned to the detective. "Since you're an old and valued customer, I don't have to give you the usual warning about what Harvey and Clement do to people who damage Marty Bagel's goods."

PAT BOONE WAS STARTING IN ON "LOVE LETTERS IN THE Sand" as Shayne left. He walked down the carpeted hallway and knocked. A redhead wearing a mesh football jersey that Southern teams favored smiled through a crack. The investigator didn't have to check her number to know what position she played.

"Hello, Tammy," he said.

"Hello, sport," she answered, showing him in. "What'll it be?"

He shut the door behind him. "I'd just like to talk."

She pouted. "Wouldn't you know it. I finally get a hunk in here and he wants the whore of MENSA. Well, it's your money."

"You remember Joanie Valin?"

Her face dropped like a late-round draft choice's in training camp who's just been paid a visit by the Turk. "You . . . you knew Joanie?"

"I paid her a lot of attention, if you know what I mean."

The call girl retreated across the room where she pulled a little cigar from a gold box. "Did Marty tell you she left?"

Shayne nodded.

"That's only part of the truth."

"What do you mean?" pressed the detective.

"One day Joanie didn't show up for work, and it wasn't long before we found out why." She exhaled slower than a heartbeat. "Joanie washed up on the beach a few days later."

Shayne pulled out the photograph. "Is this Joanie?"

"Hey, sport," snapped the girl, "I thought you said you knew her?"

Shayne flashed the remaining \$500 bill. He'd have to remember to itemize it under BUSINESS EXPENSES. Holding the cash next to the picture, he said, "Ever see any of these men?"

Tammy snatched the money and reached into the nightstand. She came out with some granny glasses. "Let me see." She held the glossy close. "Party . . . couple of years ago . . . Joanie got sick at the last minute, so Marty sent me in her place."

"Where?"

She sucked on the tip of her glasses. "One of those fancy clubs up the Beach."

"Which one?"

"Flags . . . yeah, Crossed Flags."

WITHOUT WARNING THE DOOR TO 909 OPENED BEHIND the redhead. Shayne turned to see Harvey and another primate who he figured to be Clement.

"Mr. Bagl . . . Bag . . . Marty wants to see you," said Harvey.

Deciding the pimp must have remembered who he really was, Shayne snatched the crisp bill from Tammy. His knuckles already hurt like hell, and he didn't feel like Round Two. "Hey, guys, how many bananas do you think you could buy with this?" He waved the money in front of them, then let it flutter to the floor.

For a moment he felt like he had just fumbled the ball on the Dolphins' goal line. Leaping over the scrambling hulks, he was out the door.

A WIDE SMILE TO A MOUSEY RECEPTIONIST AT THE E.R. got him the information that Lucy had been moved. He took the elevator to the second floor, but ran into a detour at the nurses' station.

"We can't let every Tom, Dick, or Harry into the ICU Ward," said a stern, gray-haired woman in a white dress and blue sweater. "People's lives are hanging in the balance, and we need to move equipment and bodies quickly, not to mention the germs, the . . ."

"Then can you just tell me how Miss Hamilton is doing?"

"Frankly, I don't know. You'll have to ask the on-duty physician."

"O.K., where is he?"

"The doctors' lounge."

"Point me in the right direction."

"You can't go back there either."

"The hell I can't, lady."

"Watch your language, young man." She reached for the telephone.

Shayne, noticing glass-paneled rooms to the right, started down the left wing. Halfway down he found a room marked DOCTORS' LOUNGE. He entered. Three men were asleep on bunk beds, and one was sitting at a small desk trying to read a medical text beneath a

Tensor light. "You the doc, pal?"

"Hope to be if my residency doesn't kill me," said a young kid.

"Who's on duty then?"

"Dr. Meadows. He's the one snoring. Covering for somebody else this shift."

"Can you check a chart for me?"

"Why not? It'll beat reading about hemorrhoids," said the resident, standing up and rubbing his backside. "Or getting them."

"Thanks."

"What's the patient's name?"

"Lucy Hamilton."

The snoring figure sat up. "What have we got going on here, Nelson, a debaters' convention?"

"No sir. I'm just trying to help this man . . ."

"Nelson," said the doctor from the bunk, "if you ever get to be a doctor—which is quite doubtful at this moment—one of the things you'll have learned is we don't show charts to civilians."

Shayne faced the whiskered figure who was rubbing his eyes. "I'm not asking for you to divulge state secrets. I just want to know how my friend is coming along."

"If I tell you," said the doctor, stifling a yawn, "will you get out of here and let me sleep?"

"Yeah."

Just then two security guards pushed through the door.

"I was wrong," said Meadows, throwing up his hands in exasperation. "This place must be Grand Central South. What's a matter, Nelson? Did you forget to invite the floor nurses to our little party?"

"Well . . ."

"Need some help, sir?" said one of the uniforms.

"I don't think so," said Meadows. As the guards left, the doctor stared at the tired detective. "How can I not help somebody who looks worse than I do? What was your friend's name?"

"Hamilton, Lucy Hamilton."

The doctor rubbed his eyes for a second, then said, "Oh yes. The battered brunette. The last time I saw a beating like that, the guy had just gone fifteen rounds."

"So?"

"Prognosis unknown. Really, Mr . . ."

"Shayne."

"Physically she's going to be O.K. But how she puts things together after all this . . . well . . . it will depend on something even we doctors

don't have much control over. Inner strength. That and, of course, the strength of friends like you."

"Thanks, doc," said the redhead. "What can I do now?"

"Nothing really. I'll know a lot more when she wakes up. We have her sedated and resting now. Trust us, Mr. Shayne."

"Right now, doc, that's all I've got."

SHAYNE PULLED UP TO THE STUCCO GUARD HOUSE AT the entrance to Crossed Flags, his mind still turning over events of the last few hours. On one hand he had a beaten secretary to worry about, and on the other, a convicted murderer with not much time left. And both had occurred on the same night. What a coincidence! The detective looked in, but the white-haired guard was fast asleep in front of a small TV set on which John Wayne was once again winning a black-and-white World War II.

Fortunately the blue and red gates were open. As Shayne drove through, he could see the reason, a small building surrounded by cars of all sizes and makes. The only thing they had in common was that to own one you had to be a blueblood, not a blue-collar.

The detective stole a peek at his watch. 3:19. A very late party. But then the people here probably didn't have to worry about punching a clock.

As he got out of the Buick, the redhead was struck by the loud music. It sounded like Lawrence Welk and his Champagne Music-makers trying to play the Rolling Stones.

Nobody noticed the detective enter, and from the smell of alcohol and grass he could understand why. In one corner two guys too big for their cummerbunds looked like fat kids racing each other to push peanuts across a table with their noses. On closer inspection he spotted the rolled-up bills and tracks of white powder.

A gaunt woman with tanned skin the texture of an alligator's slithered up to him, pulled out a cigarette, then passed out before he could light it.

On the floor several couples seemed to be finishing up a dance contest. If he were a judge, they were all runners-up—at best.

Shayne stepped up to a round bar where a sweaty bartender with rolled-up sleeves was mixing something in an Osterizer. "Hey, pal," said the detective, "how about a draft?"

The guy looked up from his overflowing food processor. "You don't know how I've yearned to hear those words. I mean, after several rounds of Flamingo Fires, Banana Bonanzas, and Tropical Passion Punches, it's great to know somebody remembers good ole brew."

Shayne sipped the head off the frosty mug. "Maybe you can return the favor."

"What do you mean?" said the bartender, throwing another peach into the processor.

The detective took out the photo. "How many of these guys do you remember?"

Abruptly the bartender shut off the machine. "You some kind of cop or process-server?"

"My question came first, pal."

"Get lost or I'll call the bouncer."

Shayne grabbed the bartender's wrist and rammed his arm into the silent processor. Pink slush spilled over the edges. The detective put his finger over one of the buttons. "Talk to me, pal, or I'll give you a free demonstration of the Finger-Matic. It slices, it dices all in one action."

The bartender's expression became as white as his apron. "You . . . wouldn't."

"Hey, industrial accidents happen all the time. I hope you're paid up on Workman's Comp."

The panicked figure looked at the photograph on the bar top. "Those guys are all members. Real heavyweights. Most of them Board of Directors. The girl I've never seen."

"Where can I find them?"

"They're not here."

"I can see that. Where are they?"

The bartender grew silent. Shayne released the arm pressure a bit. As the man started to pull his hand out of the processor, the redhead grabbed his elbow. Holding it steady, he hit BLEND. Blades swirled just beneath the bartender's fingernails. "Look at the bright side, pal. If you ever decide to go into safe-cracking, the Finger-Matic can make sure you don't leave any prints."

"O.K., O.K."

Shayne squeezed. "Talk to me, stubs."

"I'm not positive, but Bengy—used to be one of the bartenders before they canned him for fooling around with one of the teenyboppers—told me about these wild parties he used to work."

"Wild?"

"As in kinky. Leather and lace, and let it all hang out."

"Where?"

"I'm not sure."

Shayne pressed down on the bartender's elbow.

"Ease up," begged the scared figure. "All I know is there's this big house on Palm Point."

"There are a lot of big houses on Palm Point, pal. You want to see a good cure for hangnails?"

"This one's a converted lighthouse."

Feeling better than he had all night, Shayne gave him back his hand.

X

SHAYNE RECALLED THAT AT ONE TIME THE TALL SPIRE on the northernmost tip of Key Biscayne had been a major lighthouse, an integral part of the port of Miami's shipping trade. Over one hundred sixty years old, the structure loomed as one of south Florida's oldest buildings. When the historical societies had decided its maintenance was no longer "in the public interest," the lighthouse had been taken over by private enterprise.

Long before he hit the gravel driveway leading up to it, the stone erection stood, reminding the redhead of the dark towers of Arthurian legend. Somewhere behind the blackdrop, a full moon fought to be free.

As he turned off the Key and coasted to a stop, the detective noticed through the early-morning fog that even though several cars huddled together outside, only a couple of dim lights emanated from the barred windows. He got out. The thick, yellow fog wrapped itself around him like a cat seeking attention. He approached the building up an old cobblestone pathway along which a new wrought-iron railing had been added.

From what he had seen at Crossed Flags and the basic direction his investigation had taken him tonight, he had a good idea of what he'd find inside. Listening to the surf crash against a rock wall, he thought about how often "crime" arose from the opposite ends of the social spectrum. Those who didn't have any money were forced to steal it to survive. Those who had too much money had lost touch with everyday life and values, their wealth having insulated them from common concerns and decencies. Yeah, what was the R-factor of this Crossed Flags clique?

The old wooden door was locked, but with Philip Eaton's life hanging in the balance he didn't have time to wait to be invited in. His lockpick made a quick R.S.V.P.

The interior provided a total contrast to the outside. Indirect lighting cast a red glow over the large room, and thick red carpet swallowed his loafers. Black leather and chrome furniture occupied most of the space. The walls were paneled, but instead of the musty odor one might have expected, the over-sweet smell of incense weighted down the air. Soft

music escaped from hidden speakers. The decor was definitely Contemporary Brothel.

Nobody was around, but at this time of morning, despite the cars, he hadn't expected anyone. A spiral staircase rose with the incense toward what promised to be plane of pleasure. Shayne followed the steps to the second landing. The same decor prevailed, but the room was dominated by a big-screen television. In the corner a Betamax whirred, casting up taped images on the screen. Some of the men he recognized from Gloria's picture. The women were too beautiful to be walking the streets of Miami, but they were doubtless elite performers in the world's oldest profession. Their naked actions helped explain why so many porn palaces were closing. This 80's-version of the home movie was making the need for a raincoat in a darkened theatre obsolete.

Like the full moon outside poking through the dark clouds, a sudden illumination flooded his consciousness. Sure, everything had pointed in this direction, all the lines of the case intersected at this point, but with his tired mind predominantly on Lucy, he hadn't seen it.

A locked wooden cabinet sat behind the VCR. Well, he'd gone this far. What more could they charge him with? The lock surrendered to his pick in seconds. Shelves of videotape stared him in the face, each color-coded. On the inside of the door was a chart on which each color was followed by a set of initials, and some of the initials matched the names he had been given. Yeah, the trophy case for the sensitive man of the 80's.

Hours of tube time beckoned, but he couldn't afford to watch each tape on a slim chance. A closer inspection showed that every color tape had initials after it except the black. A solitary black tape sat on the top shelf.

After thirty-six minutes of tape, he had the answer.

Shoving the cassette in his sport coat pocket, he climbed to the next landing. It looked like the aftermath of a Roman orgy. Six naked men and women, stars and starlets of the tape that had been showing at the second-floor Bijou when he had come in, sprawled across a huge bed that dominated the middle of the room. Video-cameras suggested that this was the studio for these minor league Cecil B. DeMilles, and paraphernalia along the walls hinted that a prominent S&M parlor had had a going-out-of-business sale.

He pried open the left eye of the man Tim Rourke had identified as Judge Sidney Butler. The glazed look and the dilated pupil suggested that the narcotic he had taken was slightly stronger than Sominex.

Shayne descended to the second landing and made a quick phone call.

CARON THURMAN CAME BACK DOWN THE STAIRS TO THE second landing. "Judge Butler was more than willing to make the call."

Shayne said, "Was he believable?"

"He sounded even more sincere over the phone than he does from the bench." She swiped the Camel from between Shayne's lips. "Even after checking out their sexual Xanadu upstairs, I can't believe what that sanctimonious old bastard and his buddies have been up to. For two years I've watched Butler sitting up there so high and mighty dispensing justice with an iron hand and lecturing us on morality as much as legalities."

"People who play God on high have a lot longer way to fall," said the redhead.

"How long do you think it will take their ringleader to get here?"

"About twenty minutes I'd guess."

"You had this figured, then, without my information from that license plate check?"

"More or less." What Jerry King had told him about pimp's punitive practices had helped.

"Are you sure I shouldn't place that call to my captain now? I mean it's not much time before the lights along highway 27 into Starke grow dim."

Shayne glanced at his Seiko. The numbers were close. It was a little after 7:00. Out over the Atlantic a pin-prick of light promised a new day. If things worked out right, Philip Eaton might enjoy it. "All this special tape shows," he emphasized, patting the cassette in his pocket, "is that our seven sexual dwarfs had a good workout with Snow White."

"Sylvia Burke, the hooker Eaton was supposed to have killed?"

"Yeah. The tape's not a snuff flick, and it's not dated, so we have no real evidence they were involved in her death. We just have a strong suspicion that a lot of influential people who moved in the same social circles as Philip Eaton had a common bond that they obviously wouldn't want to become common knowledge. The question is: did they do something to prevent that secret from coming out?"

Caron blew out a thin trail of smoke. "If the tape connects them even tangentially, then, with a murdered woman, why'd they keep it around?"

"Egotism. The same reason they'd build a pleasure dome in a building with a shape like a lighthouse. I'm sure they got off on watching their own sexual exploits, maybe even more so because the girl's dead."

"Necrophilia." She stubbed out the cigarette. "If they got off on that, think what kind of a party they probably had planned for tonight."

"Yeah. Philip Eaton, the scapegoat for all their sins. All play and no pay, as they say on the streets."

"Well, I guarantee you some people in the right places are going to see this tape tonight." She moved beside Shayne and stared with him out a porthole window. "Why do you think Sylvia Burke bought the farm?"

"I don't know for sure, but my guess is a small lever trying to exert pressure on a big load."

"Blackmail."

"Maybe she had a copy of the tape, maybe she rated their performances and threatened to sell her records to the *National Inquirer*. Who knows?"

"So this little sex club's been in existence for over two years?"

"Yeah. After the Eaton trial they probably relocated from that mansion where Sylvia Burke was found. In fact, I'd bet the deed of sale to this place down in City records has a date right after the trial."

"The gall of these people. That's what really scorches my butt. A woman is killed, yet the party continues."

"I guess that was another part of the thrill for them. Besides, being in a clique that includes a judge must have given them the feeling they were above the law."

"You don't know how much I'm going to enjoy showing them that the long arm of the law can reach up just as easily as down."

Shayne smiled at her.

"One more thing, big guy," she said, "how'd you get on to all this?"

"A lie," he said, thinking about the composite photo. Before this was all over he was going to have to ask Gloria Eaton why she placed the figures she did in the photograph. Had she known something about the sex club?

"Should I have a couple of the uniforms upstairs take away our little troupe?"

"Sure, but don't forget to leave the Judge. An actor that good deserves a curtain call."

SHAYNE PEERED DOWN AT THE ARRIVING LIMO FROM THE third-floor loft. The license was exactly the same as the one he had noticed at Marlene Eaton's.

Caron Thurman uncuffed a dressed Judge Butler. "I'm sure I don't have to explain plea-bargaining to you. You heard my captain's O.K."

over the phone when we explained the whole thing to him. I'd love to see you fry for this one, but if we collar Numero Uno this morning, I can live with dropping your charges down to the level of jaywalking. Regardless of what happens, I get the satisfaction of knowing you'll never be up on the bench again."

"Sssshh!" said the detective.

A door below them opened. "Damn it, Sid," echoed a voice from the bottom of the staircase, "what's so hell-fired important that you wake me up this early in the morning?"

"Up here," called Butler, starting down the stairs to the second-floor screening room.

From the third floor, Shayne and Caron Thurman listened intently. Behind them two uniforms squatted. The redhead knew that as soon as the visitor had arrived, the lighthouse had been surrounded. He glanced at his watch. After 7:30. He peered over the edge, recalling the marks he had seen on Gloria Eaton's back.

The figure of Chad Binghamton appeared on the staircase. "Now what the hell is it you couldn't tell me over the phone?"

"Look over at the cabinet," said the judge.

"So it's open," said Binghamton.

"Look again at the top shelf."

"The tape—it's missing."

"That's what I called you about," said Butler.

"Don't sweat it," said Binghamton. "All that tape proves, as I've told you before, is that a few of us guys took some pictures of fun with one of Miami's more expensive courtesans."

"But . . ."

"Listen, if they'd taken pictures of what we did to her when she told us about the recording she had made at some of our earlier parties and that she wanted severance pay for it, then we could start worrying. Didn't I tell you I would take care of things?"

Shayne glanced at his watch. The second hand seemed to be sweeping like a scythe. Did he and Caron have enough to ring down the curtain?

As if reading his mind, the policewoman shook her head.

"I told you," said Butler, "when this whole thing started that I didn't trust that friend of yours who was supplying the girls."

"Hey, where else were we going to get them? From your courtroom? Marty's O.K. He couldn't help it if one of his girls got the women's lib spirit and wanted to go into business for herself." Binghamton cleared his throat. "Just a few more minutes and our troubles are all over."

"That poor slob, Eaton," said the Judge. "All he wanted was to be a part of our circle."

"Lucky for us he did. Otherwise, who'd have taken the fall for us?"
"For you."

"Hey, wait a minute. Maybe I did the dirty work, but all of us agreed by vote it had to be done then. Could I help it if none of you gutless wonders wanted to stain your righteous hands?"

"Well . . ."

"Don't forget, your honor," said Binghamton sarcastically, "we all agreed, too, to convince a doped-up Eaton that he did it and we, being his real friends, would figure out a way to get him off if he would keep quiet about our little club."

"How could I ever forget that we became his judge and jury."

"You forgot executioners," said Shayne, hurtling down the staircase. "Call your captain now, Caron."

Binghamton looked up in total shock. "Butler, you fool. A few more minutes." The lawyer turned toward the staircase. "Carlos, get up here quick," he yelled.

Shayne crossed the room swiftly. Grabbing Binghamton by the shoulder, he spun him around. The redhead was surprised when the athletic figure went down with only a quick right to the jaw.

The detective looked at the staircase. One cop came running down to help as Carlos emerged. The Hispanic cowboy grabbed the cop's foot and threw him down the stairwell.

Shayne took three steps and swung his foot as if the SuperBowl depended on his kick.

Carlos jerked backward, his body performing a reverse somersault before it smacked into the first floor.

Shayne followed his down. The door burst open and several cops came in with .38's ready. He looked up to see Caron Thurman prodding a resisting Chad Binghamton down the stairway with her snubnose.

"Did you get through?" said Shayne.

"Captain Yale's making the call right now. With what we've got on tape plus the witness, Eaton's going to have some old and close friends join him at Starke."

Shayne pulled the lawyer's bodyguard to his feet.

"Look at those boots, Mike," said the policewoman.

"What about them?"

"The figures tattooed in them."

"Red dragons," said the detective. "Earlier tonight I got to check them out at close range."

"Unusual?"

"One in a million. Why?"

"I called that Harold Somers you told me about. I didn't tell you this earlier because it didn't seem important, but Somers remembered one thing in particular about Lucy's assailant. He had on boots with little red dragons on them."

Shayne shoved his forearm in under Carlos's chin, gradually cutting off his air supply.

A cop standing beside the detective said, "Hey, fella, you can't . . ."

Caron Thurman said, "Officer, don't you have something else to do."

"Yes, sir, eh, ma'am."

"Why, Carlos?" said Shayne.

The Hispanic gazed into Shayne's burning eyes. Not liking what he saw in them, he said, "He ordered me to."

Shayne looked over at the lawyer, then the Hispanic. "Why?"

"Because Gloria Eaton told him she was going to come to you in some last, desperate maneuver to save her brother. When Mr. Binghamton couldn't talk her out of it, he sent me to beat up your secretary so's to keep you busy. I followed her from your office, but that exercise club was my first chance."

"Be quiet, Carlos," said Binghamton. "You know I'm a lawyer. Don't worry, though. Any coerced confession is not admissible."

Caron said, "Binghamton, you have the right to remain silent, and I'm telling you to, or your jaw'll be too broken to do anything but suck soup through a straw."

"He also tell me to kill Gloria Eaton," volunteered Carlos.

"Kill," said Shayne. "Why?"

"That picture she give you?"

"How did she know which men to put in it?"

"Her brother tell her once, I think."

Binghamton was shaking his head.

"Caron," said the redhead, "you look kind of busy in here. Why don't you let me help you by escorting Mr. Binghamton out to a black-and-white?"

"We could use the help," she said, "but watch out for him. He's the kind who'll try to escape."

Even before Shayne grabbed the lawyer's arm, he could detect fear in the man's eyes.

XXI

SHAYNE STOOD UP AND STRETCHED BEFORE THE CLOCK at the nurses' station. 8:40. He had come straight to Mercy from the

lighthouse. Louvered shades sliced the morning light into fragments that made him squint. He flexed his right hand. Pain welled up beneath the scarred knuckles, but it was the second-best feeling he had had all night. No, nothing could really make up to Lucy what Binghamton had ordered Carlos to do, but sometimes in the blind lady's world minor satisfactions were the best to be hoped for.

A thin doctor emerged from Lucy's ICU and came toward him. "Well, doc?" he said, meeting the physician half way.

"Ms. Hamilton is awake and has just been fed. You can go in to see her, but just for a second. Let me warn you. Her face is swollen and she's not a pretty sight."

"If she's well, doc, that's beautiful enough for me."

He was starting toward her room when he heard a loud "Mike" from behind him.

He turned to spot a haggard-looking Caron Thurman. As they drew closer, he could see her eyes were red and she was breathless. "What's a matter?" he said.

"Damn it, Mike! We were too late."

"What?"

"By the time Captain Yale got the call through to Starke, they had already thrown the switch." She collapsed against his chest, and he could feel her labored breathing. "It's not fair. We were so close, so close. Why?"

Shayne, feeling the helplessness rush into his own gut as the energy drained, had nothing he could tell her.

Suddenly she jerked back. "Listen to me, sobbing like some schoolgirl. What's wrong with me? Where do I get off expecting complete justice?"

"Caron, just because we've been in this business a long time doesn't mean we can turn on and off our emotions like a garden hose." Gently he raised her chin. "Hey, we gave it our best shot."

She smiled weakly as if to acknowledge the rationalization. "Did I interrupt something important?"

"Yeah."

Straightening herself up and pulling her sweatshirt jacket down, she said through quivering facial muscles, "Catch you later, big guy."

They turned and walked in opposite directions. Shayne opened the door into the ICU slowly.

Even through the layers of guaze he could see the brunette's soft eyes.

Her gaze caught his. "Looks like I won't be going to my exercise class for a while," she said slowly.

"Hello, Angel," he said with all the happiness he could muster.
"We've got to stop meeting like this."

"Michael," she answered, "what's wrong with you? You look like
you haven't slept all night. What have you been doing?"

"It's a long story, Angel, but I guess you could say I was trying to
help a blind lady cross a mean street." ●

A MOMENTOUS MEETING

This was a lofty chamber, lined and littered with countless bottles. Broad, low tables were scattered about, which bristled with retorts, test-tubes, and little Bunsen lamps, with their blue flickering flames. There was only one student in the room, who was bending over a distant table absorbed in his work. At the sound of our steps he glanced round and sprang to his feet with a cry of pleasure. "I've found it! I've found it," he shouted to my companion, running towards us with a test-tube in his hand. "I have found a re-agent which is precipitated by haemoglobin, and by nothing else." Had he discovered a gold mine, greater delight could not have shone upon his features.

"Dr. Watson, Mr. Sherlock Holmes," said Stamford, introducing us.

"How are you?" he said cordially, gripping my hand with a strength for which I should have hardly have given him credit. "You have been in Afghanistan, I perceive."

"How on earth did you know that?" I asked in astonishment.

—A STUDY IN SCARLET
by A. Conan Doyle

They called him Svengali—but nothing could be further from the truth. Doctor Odo always indulged his pigeons, granted every wish in their hearts. Naturally they wanted to repay him!

Doctor Odo's Power

by WILLIAM M. STEPHENS

EIGHT HOURS TO GO AND NO CHANCE FOR A REPRIEVE. I am nervous, naturally, but also outraged. To think that The Great Odo should die convicted of crimes that never took place. Such irony, after all I have gotten away with for fifty years.

But I shall take it in stride. When my time comes, no one will detect any sign of fear in Odo's countenance. I shall sink into a deep trance and tell my subconscious mind that the execution is only a sham and that I, The Great Odo, am in control as always. I will walk into that chamber smiling, radiating confidence, and take my seat as carelessly as if I were joining a beautiful woman for an intimate *tete-a-tete* (which I *will* be doing, in my mind). The reporters will write more stories of the remarkable and self-possessed Doctor Odo.

And who knows? Perhaps I really am, as I have maintained, the reincarnation of an ancient Egyptian sorcerer. Perhaps I will return with even more power and charm—and hopefully more discretion. I must keep my mind focussed to that end. It would be nice, indeed, to be a young man again—even though I dread the prospect of going through that dreadful age of puberty once more.

My deepest regret is that I never wrote my autobiography. I could not afford to. Now, for the first time, I am free to tell all. How sad that I have so little time. The most I can do is hit the high spots and correct some of the libels and distortions that were disseminated by the media.

Svengali, they call me. Idiots! Svengali used his power forcefully, against the will of his subjects. I, on the other hand, have always indulged my pigeons. Every wish in their hearts was granted. Through me they achieved their wildest desires. Naturally they were eager, in return, to endow handsomely the man of their dreams.

I WAS BORN IN CALIFORNIA SOME FIFTY-ODD YEARS AGO. The exact date, place, and family name are unimportant. My boyhood was fairly ordinary until, at the age of eighteen, I discovered that women found me irresistible. A whole new world opened up.

For many years I did not fully understand the source of my magnetism. I was not tall, handsome, or muscular. I have always had expressive eyes and a gentle touch, but these qualities were hardly enough to explain my astounding successes.

My voice. That was the key. Not its timbre or resonance or rhythm. These were important, undoubtedly, for women always seemed to hang on my words. But it was the *words* themselves that mattered. The choice and use of words. Somehow I instinctively selected words that triggered deep emotions. My words, in a Jungian sense, were archetypal barbs—subtle suggestions that struck chords deep in the female subconscious.

I had no formal training in hypnosis. As a boy I assisted a stage hypnotist and picked up his methods of working rapidly and creating confusion to mask a frontal assault. In one summer I learned all his tricks and more. Hypnosis is an ancient art, albeit a simple one. There are many techniques and I know them all.

But traditional hypnosis lost its appeal for me many years ago. It is limited and confining. My goal has been to attain the same results by subtle, unstructured means. *My fait accompli* is to put a person in a trance without resort to the rituals of conventional hypnosis, and without alerting my subject to my intentions.

Can a lady be hypnotized against her will? Hardly. Can she be hyp-

notized without her knowledge? Absolutely, as I have proven on hundreds of occasions.

My methods require a suitable cover, so I early assumed the role of a Turkish physician, Doctor Odo. As a doctor, I would always have an excuse to help a lady relax or conquer a headache. Being a Turk suited my bold eyes, swarthy complexion, and romantic nature. It also gave me an excuse to cover my bald spot with a turban. Need I explain where I got the name Odo? It is a variation, of course, of the word *od*, which denotes the great natural force behind both magnetism and mesmerism.

For years I worked the resorts—Palm Beach, Catalina, Las Vegas, the Riviera—with marked success. I knew the right people and I lived like a king. But unfortunately I became fat, complacent, and careless, and I was entrapped by detectives hired by a jealous husband.

Scandal was followed by humiliation, indictment, and conviction. During seven long years of incarceration, I lost my fat and the rest of my hair. I did a lot of thinking about where my life was headed and emerged from prison a changed man. Never again would I indulge in liquor, tobacco, or excessive carbohydrates. I would limit my salt intake and get plenty of exercise. And I would steer clear of the international circuit, where I was *persona non grata*.

In Miami, where I had stashed emergency funds, I bought conservative clothes and the tools of my trade—a sphygmomanometer and a stethoscope. These simple instruments are the secret weapons of my covert style of hypnosis. How many people would set up mental blocks against a physician who is checking their pulse or blood pressure?

I WAS NOW PUSHING FIFTY (AND LOOKED SIXTY) SO I adopted a new approach in a new arena. I volunteered to give health checkups at the senior citizens centers. Everything went smoothly, and I was soon popular, rich, and fulfilled.

Generally I gave two or three brief lectures a week. A typical audience consisted of several dozen elderly people (mostly female). I would talk about health, nutrition, and exercise, strolling among the group as I spoke and establishing strong eye contact. This gave me an opportunity to select the best prospects—those who appeared both affluent and receptive. The next step was to pinpoint the natural somnambulists.

For my purpose, you understand, I require women who can slip easily and quickly into a trance. And they must be capable of going to the deepest levels, where hallucinations and amnesia can be induced. From my experience, almost everyone can be hypnotized, but only about one in four is a natural somnambulist.

On an average working day I would find several good subjects. If only one of them satisfied other requirements (living alone, having no close relatives or friends, and having ample fluid resources), I could easily maintain my income requirement of about \$2,000 a week. I needed this much to support my forays to the jai alai frontons, the race-tracks, and the casinos at Grand Bahama.

After every lecture I offered to check everybody's blood pressure. With most people I played it straight, recording their systolic and diastolic readings on a card and making appropriate recommendations. If the numbers were high, I would advise a visit to their personal physician for a followup examination. It always pays to send business to physicians, I've found, and it kept the AMA off my back for many years.

But with those special ladies I had spotted, I would give more individual attention. "Relax . . . breathe slowly and deeply," I would say. "Allow your heart to slow down, my dear, so that my reading will be true . . . and I can help you." (At this point I might stroke her wrist lightly.) "You will feel better . . . much better . . . if you listen carefully to my voice and relax deeply within . . . while your body responds to my words."

And so on. Frequently a woman would actually go into a light trance before I had fastened the blood-pressure band around her arm. These and others who responded positively were invited to stay for a private consultation, at which time I would learn their trance capabilities and other vital information.

SUCH RICH MEMORIES I HAVE OF MY PIGEONS. EACH IS A story in herself. But time is fleeting, and I must limit this chronicle to only a few of my lovelies. Mainly to Emma Goldstein and Rachel Schwartz, with whom I worked during the final days of my practice. With Emma my prowess was shown at its peak. With Rachel, I proved that even a genius has an Achilles heel.

Emma Goldstein is a rich and generous widow, and a superb hypnotic subject. If you asked her today, she would deny that she has ever been hypnotized. If you inquired about Doctor Odo, she would recall attending some of my lectures and having her blood pressure checked. Nothing more. If you mentioned my troubles with the law, she would, I suspect, express confidence in my innocence. Undoubtedly she remembers me as a kindly man dedicated to helping people.

If you suggested to Emma Goldstein that she might have been bilked by me, she would be outraged. "Why, the very idea!" she might say. "I was never bilked by anyone!"

If you were an intimate friend, Emma might confide to you, however, that she recently gave \$20,000 to a talented young composer, Max Riedel, who needed funds to help his parents escape from East Germany. She would tell you that she is eagerly awaiting Max's return, for she intends to sponsor the young man's musical career. Perhaps she would admit that she is madly in love with Max.

Poor sweet Emma. I wish I could help you realize the rest of your dream. Without the help of your Odo, you can never see Max Riedel again. For Max exists only in the hypnotic fantasies stimulated by the power of The Great Odo.

It is a mark of my genius that no one can connect me to a single dollar of the money lost by my victims. Even if all the ladies who have contributed to my wealth reported their losses to the police, each description of the man involved would be different. (Because the men and the roles they played were created not by me, but by the subconscious desires of the women themselves. I was only the guide, the catalyst.)

For example, Esther Tyson would assert that she gave money to a former Dolphin linebacker to establish a school for underprivileged youngsters. Maude Kelly would claim that she turned over her holdings to a financial wizard for investment in Rhodesian gold stocks. Sarah Pritkin would maintain that she supported the research of an archaeologist who was searching for the sunken continent of Atlantis. Rachel Schwartz . . . I'm not sure what Rachel would say. She is a most exceptional case. You must judge for yourself after you've heard the evidence.

BUT BACK TO EMMA GOLDSTEIN. AT OUR FIRST PRIVATE session, she slipped easily into a deep trance and I led her to hallucinate an idyllic scene in which she met the man of her dreams. She described him as a blond, virile musician who was madly in love with her.

"What is his name?" I asked her.

She sat still, her eyes closed, studying her idealized male figure. "Max," she said. "Max Riedel."

"Now listen carefully," I said. "Time has passed and your relationship with Max Riedel has matured. You love each other passionately. At this moment you are in a secluded place awaiting your lover. Now he is approaching. Do you see him?"

She nodded and her lips parted. "Oh, Max! Come to me, my lover, my Adonis."

"I will withdraw," I told her, "and leave you alone with Max. As soon as my voice departs, Max will make love to you as you have always dreamed of being loved. Max will be everything you have always

wanted, and he will leave no desire unfulfilled." I gave her time-distortion suggestions, so that she would experience in a few minutes by the clock an entire evening of bliss in her lover's arms.

Leaving Emma on the couch, I sat at my desk across the room, looking out the window and trying not to intrude on her privacy—for, quite frankly, I was somewhat embarrassed by the sounds of her passion.

After a while I gently brought the session to an end and suggested amnesia for the entire episode. Before waking her, I implanted a post-hypnotic suggestion that would allow me, at any time, to put her into an instantaneous trance.

She woke on demand and I told her that her blood pressure now tested normal. "It was high at first because you were under tension," I told her. "You must learn to relax, Mrs. Goldstein."

She nodded. "Did I go to sleep, Doctor? I feel so . . . wonderfully rested."

"Yes. You dozed off, so I left you alone." I smiled. "Did you have pleasant dreams?"

"I . . . don't know. I think so. I feel kind of bubbly all over."

I nodded sagely. "That's what deep relaxation will do, Mrs. Goldstein."

While she stood by the door, preparing to leave, I tested the posthypnotic suggestion. Stroking my beard and winking my right eye, I saw her eyes go out of focus and knew that she was again in a trance. "Listen carefully, my dear," I said. "Do you know a man named Max Riedel?"

". . . Yes." A smile tugged at her mouth as she stared through me into space.

"Who is Max Riedel?"

"He is . . . my lover."

"Would you do anything that Max asked you to do?"

". . . Yes."

"If Max needed a large sum of money, would you give it to him?"

She frowned as she weighed my words, and I realized she was troubled by the term "a large sum of money." The subconscious mind is a literal mind. One must be specific and unambiguous when dealing with a person in a somnambulistic trance.

"If Max needed five thousand dollars," I amended, "would you give it to him?"

"Yes."

I sighed with relief. Later I could learn the extent of her resources. For the present I could proceed with the knowledge that Emma was worthy of cultivation.

At that moment I made a decision. I would allow Emma to "remember" consciously her affair with Max Riedel. This would make her happy. More important, it would make her easier to control. If, in the future, she were called upon to transact business with bank officers or stock brokers, she would do so thinking it was all her own idea. This is a safer method, generally, than either of the alternatives—to have her do complicated tasks while in a trance or under the compulsion of a post-hypnotic suggestion.

Before waking her I again gave her amnesia to our conversation and her hallucinations. "After you wake," I told her, "you will go home immediately. As soon as you sit down, you will find yourself becoming sleepy. Very relaxed . . . very sleepy. You will not be able to keep your eyes open. You will take a short nap and dream of Max Riedel . . . of Max making love to you. When you wake up, you will remember it all as an actual incident and not a dream. Everything that has happened between you and Max will be recalled vividly by you."

I paused. "Only I can bring Max Riedel to you. Any time you hear my voice say 'Max Riedel,' you will immediately go into a deep trance and await my instructions. You will respond to no voice except mine."

Next day I telephoned Emma and put her to the acid test. When she answered the phone, I said softly: "Max Riedel." There was no audible response, so I asked her about Max and her answers convinced me that she was in the trance state. After reinforcing her memories of Max, I told her of Max's need for money to rescue his parents from the Communists. Then I questioned her about her resources and learned that she had about \$40,000 in savings plus extensive real estate holdings and securities. I decided to leave the land and securities alone. I am not a greedy man. Besides, why complicate my life? Cash is simple and meets all my needs.

I told Emma that Max needed \$10,000 to pay for help in smuggling his parents out of East Berlin. The Communists were watching Max, I said, so she would have to be extremely careful. She would put the money in a paper bag, then walk to Bayfront Park at 10:00 a.m. and sit on a bench near the water. Someone passing by would speak her name. At that moment she would get up and walk away, forgetting all about the paper bag, which she would leave on the bench.

It worked perfectly. She didn't recognize me, of course, because I had told her she would not see anyone she knew while in the park.

A month later I acquired another \$10,000 from her; and that was, sadly, the last time I saw Emma. Further contact was made impractical by my arrest, indictment, and trial.

TIME FLIES, MY FRIENDS. LIGHT STREAKS IN THE EASTERN sky warn of the approach of dawn. I must hurry and tell you about Rachel Schwartz, who had a profound effect on my life. Ah, sweet, beautiful Rachel, the object of my undying love and the cause of my humiliation.

I cannot blame Rachel, of course. What had to happen has happened. It was Fate . . . my own karma pursuing me from the nefarious acts of my past. She was an instrument only . . . but what an instrument! At this moment I would die happily in her arms. (No great sacrifice, I might add, when I consider the alternative.)

Rachel had a lovely smile, translucent skin, and a youthful body. She had been a professional dancer, she told me, and she radiated health and vitality. Her eyes were as green as the skin of an avocado, and they produced a strange light of their own. I remember well the first time she attended my lecture. She wore a bewitching dress and a ravishing string of pearls. She caught my eye, believe me. And when I gave my standard spiel, she never missed a word.

Later, while I was checking her blood pressure, she told me she had lost her husband a year before and was in the midst of settling his estate. I nodded sympathetically as I read the dial on the sphygmomanometer. "Your blood pressure is up a wee bit, my dear. Obviously you've been under stress."

"Yes," she said, never taking her incredible eyes from my face. "Poor Justin had over a million dollars in accounts receivable, and I had to write so many letters. It's a strain to deal with money matters."

"Yes, indeed," I said, "but it's a necessary part of life." I paused and frowned. "Let me check this reading again. Relax, my dear. You're in good hands. Relax . . . and I can help you get that diastolic down a bit."

She nodded. "Justin's law partners agreed to take over all his open cases and to pay me a generous settlement. Next week I'll get a nice check and I don't know what in the world to do with it."

"Hmmmm. Yes. Well, of course there are blue chip investments . . . and other alternatives if the sum is substantial." Stroking my beard, I said, "Mrs. Schwartz, it still reads 155 over 90. Perhaps you should sit quietly here and let me check you again after I finish with the others. I think I can help you. I know I can help you."

She stayed and we had a long talk. Later I took her to dinner—a rash and unprecedented act. For the first time in my memory, I spent an evening with a woman without trying to exert my power over her . . . without even prying into her subconscious. I actually forgot what I was there for.

NEXT DAY I WOKE AGHAST AT MY BEHAVIOR AND DETERMINED to get back into control of the situation. I telephoned Rachel, and she invited me over for lunch. In order to keep things on a professional footing. I took my doctor's bag and sphygomanometer.

She served a delightful repast of sauteed mushrooms, oysters rockefeller, and sauterne. When we retired to the living room overlooking Biscayne Bay, she told me I had the most soothing voice she had ever heard. "I could listen to you forever," she said softly.

"Flattery will get you everywhere, my dear," I quipped, leaning closer to stroke her hand.

Raising her eyes to mine, she said, "Talk to me, Odo."

What could I say? For the first time in my life, I was speechless. I could see flecks of gold in the green depths of her eyes. The iris of the eye on which my gaze was locked pulsated slowly, drawing me into its depths.

I began talking, haltingly at first, and finally the words flowed like nectar from a wine-press, as if some star-kissed lover (or poet) was speaking through me. As if from afar, I heard my voice speak of crystal streams tumbling over mossy rocks . . . misty clouds drifting over mountain peaks . . . limpid pools reflecting the graceful form of my beloved. And—the most remarkable thing of all—everything I put into words I *experienced* and felt deeply in the core of my being. No, not just experienced. I *became* the experience; and Rachel became it, too. At times, in fact—for blinding instants of ecstasy—we were not two persons at all, but *one*—our hearts beating with simultaneity and our blood comingled like wine poured from one vessel to another.

The intensity of the experience varied constantly, as a wave rises and falls, and I have no recollection of the deeper aspects. (I know of their existence only because of later events.) But I well recall moments of complete role-reversal in which she was a hypnotherapist and I a patient eager to open my soul to her. In other moments I was a child in my mother's lap, confessing my transgressions and receiving the succor of her sweet breast.

And all the time she was wired for sound! Yes, indeed. My darling Rachel was a forensic hypnotist hired by the State to gather evidence against me on the piddling charge of practicing medicine without a license.

Rachel was so skilled at her work, and I so eager to please, that I confessed to crimes I never committed. It's true, so help me. Don't tell me the subconscious never lies. My entire career, my life and my death, are testimonial to the fact that it can and does lie. The subconscious, skill-

fully handled, can interpret the most outrageous fantasy as pure unadulterated truth. It can do so unabashedly, with such verisimilitude that even a judge and jury can be utterly fooled. (I try hard to appreciate the humor in this ironic twist of fate. As my mother often said, "Your chickens always come home to roost.")

While opening my psyche to Dr. Rachel Schwartz, I divulged certain scenarios my subconscious had woven around some of my pigeons. To relieve my mind of the boredom—nay, *malaise*—that sometimes stole over me, I conceived plans to commit a perfect murder by hypnosis. Understand. These were mere mental calisthenics—challenges for my tired brain to liven up the dull routine. Ideas and nothing more, and I never put them into action.

In one of these fantasies, I determined to give one of my dearest victims a jar labeled Vitamin C, but which actually contained barbiturates. Then I would implant in her subconscious the conviction that megadoses of Vitamin C would instantly eliminate any symptom of illness. The next time she had a headache or a cough, I told her, she would feel an uncontrollable impulse to swallow every Vitamin C capsule in the jar.

The stage set; I could simply have let nature take its course. Or, if I wished, I could hasten her demise by a telephone call in which I would create any symptom I wished by suggestion.

Simple and straightforward enough, is it not? And I have no doubt it would have had the desired result if subjected to a test. The fact that it never was tested is only academic at this point. For the jury bought the fantasy lock, stock, and barrel, aided by evidence that one Abigail Williams died of a massive overdose of barbiturates two weeks after having her blood pressure checked by me. Opportunity? Desire? Malice? It was all established to their satisfaction.

Another fantasy I had revealed to Rachel was a bit more elaborate. Whether it would work at all is highly conjectural. In this hypothetical scene, I led a lady, while in trance, through a scenario in which she was driving her car on the freeway. Upon seeing a certain overpass ahead, she was told, she would suddenly realize (fantasize) that someone else was driving her car while she, a detached observer, floated above. She would watch with interest while the "driver" ran the car into a concrete abutment.

Far out? I agree. I would have been a fool to test such a scenario, would I not? Such an emergency situation might well have produced instant and total recall of the memories I had so carefully suppressed, leaving me open to criminal prosecution. But the jury, by this time accepting me as an evil genius of satanic stature, had no problem

accepting my fanciful hypothesis as actual fact. Needless to say, their conclusion was supported by evidence that one Maybelle Smith had driven her car against a concrete abutment, killing her, only ten days after I had checked her blood pressure.

You see. I didn't have a chance. The fact that thousands of elderly women had had their blood pressure checked by me, and hundreds of them had undoubtedly died later of any number of natural and accidental causes, was of no consequence. As a matter of fact, if my lawyer had introduced evidence to this effect, I am convinced the jury would have convicted me of hundreds of murders.

Believe me, dear reader. The Great Odo has never been responsible for the death of a single woman. But *they*, on the contrary, unwittingly have contributed to my conviction and my execution.

BUT TIME, LIKE LIFE, IS FLEETING. I MUST CLOSE THIS document with a few choice words spoken by the State Attorney (who, to cap my humiliation, was female) in the State's final argument at the trial:

"Ladies and gentlemen," she said, "we took aim to slap down a mosquito and we caught a buzzard. We set our nets for a minnow and we landed a shark. We set out to jail a gentle fraud and we caught a deceiving, stealing, womanizing, *murdering* snake-in-the-grass."

So that's about it. I was entrapped by a woman, prosecuted (persecuted, that is) by a woman, and convicted by a jury of nine women and three men. (Talk about discrimination! After all I have done to help women achieve their aspirations and fulfill themselves!)

The sun is painting the palms in the east with touches of gold. Soon the guard will arrive with the priest. I will give him this manuscript and ask him to deliver a note to Rachel. Short, sweet, and to the point:

RACHEL, MY LOVE. DON'T FORGET ME. WE HAVE UNFINISHED BUSINESS. I WILL BE BACK. YOUR ODO. ●

PUZZLE

Here's a simple one that shouldn't tax anyone's brain for more than a few seconds. It's a Sherlock Holmes quote from A CASE OF IDENTITY.

TN ATRO PMIT SOME HTYL ETIN IFNI ERAS GNIH
TELT TILE HTTA HTEN IMFO MOIX ANAN EEBG
NOLS AHTI

*In order to pull a decent scam, a con man required a pigeon
that had the three G's. The first one was gullibility!*

Bank Examiner

by RICHARD E. GIVAN

CHARLES SHEARER WAS A MAN TO INSPIRE CONFIDENCE. Tall and silver-maned, he had a long, dignified, almost stern, face softened by a touch of laugh wrinkles above his shining cheeks. Charcoal pinstripes draped elegantly down from his thin shoulders to a slight break over brilliantly polished shoes. Put him behind a mahogany desk with those elegant fingers laced tightly as a bank vault and set him speaking in that silky, earnest voice of bond debentures and stock issues, and people felt as if his life had been dedicated solely to the preservation of their assets.

It had always been so. As a fresh-faced youth, he was the earnest lad who was always getting nominated for class treasurer even though his accounts seemed always to suffer mysterious shortages. As a matured man, he had the look of "sound character" that made strangers who normally counted their change from the neighborhood paperboy trust him with their life savings. Charley was well aware of the trust people instinctively placed in him, and he worked hard to refine it. He was what is sometimes called a confidence man.

AT THAT PARTICULAR TIME IN HIS LIFE, CHARLEY HAD seen better times. He would have said that he was between jobs. To one of his rare friends, between con jobs. The truth was that he had barely escaped a felony theft-by-false-pretenses rap when a diligently distrustful trust officer had blown his last job, and he had yet to acquire the working capital to set up a fresh job. Charley was a firm believer in the business principle that it takes money to make money. That, and the fact that he needed money for the basic necessities, was why he was wasting his considerable talents on such a bush league scam known in the trade as the bank examiner. Still, a craftsman takes pride

in his work, be he a joiner making a flower box or an accountant filing a short form. Charley was a pro doing a donkey scam, but he would do it up right.

He sat at a desk in a Ramada Inn suite located in a minor city in a midsized midwestern state, no matter which one. To him, the midwest was all a parched desert anyway. Not enough money and not enough greed to pull a decent con. He tried to keep the irritation out of his voice as he reasoned with his temporary apprentice/accomplice, Tom Aker. "One more pigeon. Then we blow for Miami. I've got a line on a con to pry some of those rich widows from some of their tax shelters. We need one more score for seed money."

"I don't know, Charley. We already scored sixty miles up the road. You always said getting greedy was the quickest way to get yourself a forwarding address to the nearest state pen." Lying sprawled across the king-size bed, Tom was a younger, flintier version of Charley, which was why Charley had offered to team up with him. That and the fact that Tom was willing to split the profits three-to-one with expenses down the middle. Tom's wire-brush manners and Clint Eastwood scowls, along with the way his hair stood at attention and his shirts out-brighted white made him a natural for the role of FBI agent. Not because the Bureau's field men really look that way, but because most people readily accept that they do. Anyone who investigates crime-by-numbers ought to look like that.

"Are you telling me how to work a con?" Charley's nose rose a fraction, and tiny clouds of frost seemed to gather around his imperious brow.

"Hell no, Charley," Tom said quickly. "It's just that, well, I got a bad feeling about shooting for another touch after we already made one so close. This place ain't that big, you know."

Charley stalled, pretending to coax a loose eyelash from his eye. The thing was, even though Tom was right, he had an itch to work the town. Six years before—long before he had taken on Tom—Charley had worked the bank examiner there. He remembered it as the perfect con—the easiest ten grand he had ever made. With his eyes closed he could see the blue-haired pigeon standing at her door as he drove away with her ten grand in his pocket. Her face was lit up with satisfaction at helping a bank examiner catch a crooked bank teller. He sometimes wondered how long she felt so smug. How did her lined old face look after the morning came, and she realized her money was gone? Did that shy grin fade like her dress? Did it crumble like the mulch around her tea roses? Such speculation was an idle game, and he never wasted much time on it.

HE PICKED UP THE PHONE BOOK ON THE DESK IN FRONT of him and held it a moment. He could rival any geographer's population estimate by simply hefting the local directory. When he spoke, it was with the voice that Moses commanded upon first overlooking Canaan. "Sixty-five thousand. This is a good place, Tom. I can feel it. Look at the names in this book. Farmer's names, tradespeople, working people. Look at the town's main street—it's still called Main Street, and over half the cars on it are pickup trucks. Little kids playing sandlot ball and cutting lawns for dollars. Small enough the people are still trusting. The corner groceries carry your account. Down at the bank, they figure an overdraft must be a mistake in your checkbook, and they pay it anyway. You borrow money on a handshake. Half the front doors aren't locked at night. The yuks in this town are trusting, and trust is very close to gullibility. Remember what I told you about pulling any decent scam? You need three things. The three G's. And the first one is Gullibility."

Tom shrugged with an uneasy frown of resignation. "Okay, Charley. You're the boss. I'm just here for window dressing."

Charley beamed a paternal smile. No greater joy is there than that of conning a con man. "Good boy. Remember, I was working this scam when you were hustling marbles from snotnoses on the playground. You just sit tight and watch the master at work. A good trade is a valuable thing to have."

Charley went to work. He thumbed through the phone book, sometimes referring to a city map spread out on the desk. Several times he seemed to have something, but found some fault that made him shake his leonine head and draw a fine-tip line through the name he had just circled. Finally he found one that satisfied him. "Here's our next pigeon. I like the name—Agnes Pingleton. Always look for the old-fashioned names, Tom. The Matildas, the Gertrudes, the Gracies. They're almost sure to be the old birds. Since their names are listed in the book, they are usually the head of their house and probably live alone. Look for an old-fashioned woman's name that goes with an address on one of those streets in the old neighborhoods that we scouted when we hit town."

"I been wondering about something, Charley. Like you said, anything over a hundred bucks is a felony. Then why don't we go for megabucks? Why waste the con on these old prunes who barely have the money to keep a roof over their grey heads? Let's shoot for some bag living up in the heights."

Charley shook his head sadly. "I gave you more credit than that. You don't work this scam on rich people. They have too much savvy

for the bank examiner. Or, if they don't, they have someone else looking after their money. The con's got to fit the mark, or it won't work. With the bank examiner, you look for a fast five to ten thousand per. Anything more than that is gravy. Now shut up while I give Miss Pingleton the shocking news about her bank."

Instead of dialing, however, Charley stood and pulled the muted club tie tightly to his neck and put on his suit coat. He sat down and composed himself on the desk chair. He formed a mental picture of himself behind some imposing desk in a corner office at the bank. It never hurt to look after the details when he wanted to sound sincere. He dialed the number.

The bell broke on the fourth ring. A high, thin voice came tentatively over the wire. "Hello?" Charley liked her already.

"Hello, is this Agnes Pingleton's residence?"

"Yes, it is."

Charley purred into the receiver. "Then you must be Mrs. Pingleton? It is Mrs., isn't it?"

"Yes, but I'm a widow. My husband's been dead for years."

"Oh, I am sorry, Mrs. Pingleton. My name is Charles Bennett, and I am Senior Vice-President of the Midstate Commerce Bank. My records indicate that you are one of our savings account customers."

Charley looked at Tom and made a pantomime of flipping a coin into the air. According to the city map, Mrs. Pingleton lived closer to a Midstate branch office than any other bank, but it was still a gamble that she would bank there. It was one of the few angles out of his control.

"Yes, I have an account at that branch. Why, Mr. Bennett? Is there some trouble? I've been saving there for almost twenty years without any problems."

Charley beamed and made the okay sign to Tom. This job was turning out nicely. The old woman had just the right touch of concern in her voice. "I wouldn't say trouble, exactly, Mrs. Pingleton. Umm, before we proceed, could I first confirm that I am talking to the right person? After all, what I have to say is highly confidential. Could you please give me your account number?"

"Oh, certainly. My passbook is in the drawer right here by the phone." Charley heard the sounds of rustling paper before she read him the number.

"Yes, ma'am, your account number checks with my records. For a double-check, what does your book indicate as the current balance on deposit with us?"

"Thirteen thousand, four hundred and seven dollars, and twenty-

three cents."

"And twenty-three cents," echoed Charley, writing down the figure on a pad of paper. "Checks out to the penny, Mrs. Pingleton. You keep excellent records. Now, I'm afraid that I have some shocking news for you, ma'am."

"Not my money! That's my retirement nest egg. It's all that's left from the insurance when Herbert passed on."

"Oh, no, ma'am. I didn't mean to alarm you. Your money is absolutely safe with us. You have my personal guarantee on that. I am afraid, however, that if one of the bank employees had his way, your money might not be so safe."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, ma'am, to be frank, we're pretty sure one of the tellers is embezzling funds from some of the customers' accounts."

"Why, that's awful!"

"Yes, ma'am. It's a great concern to us in management. The bank examiners just today discovered the shortages during a routine audit down here at the main office—a spot check that the tellers didn't know about. Now, we are almost sure who the guilty party is, but the problem is that we need proof that this particular individual is the thief. Say! You sound like a dependable citizen. I wonder . . ."

"What, Mr. Bennett?"

"I was wondering if you would possibly help us get the evidence we need to prevent this criminal from stealing any more money. I assure you that there would be absolutely no risk to you or your money if you do help us. All we would need would be for you to withdraw some money for a short time." Charley drew a large letter G in the air and held up two fingers. Tom would understand. It was the second G characteristic of the perfect pigeon. Goodheartedness.

"Oh my, Mr. Bennett. I don't know. I've never done anything like this before."

"It's a routine procedure in cases like this. Actually, we've called in an agent of the FBI, Special Agent Winston to coordinate the investigation. He asked me to look for one of our most trusted customers to do this for us. And, Mrs. Pingleton, I should also mention that the bank would insist on giving you a reward for helping us to catch this thief in the act. The president has authorized me to award a thousand dollar certificate of deposit."

"Why, I'm speechless, Mr. Bennett! I'll do it!"

Charley triumphantly held up three fingers to signal his completion of the pigeon's holy trinity of G's—Greed. "Excellent. I had a feeling we could count on you, Mrs. Pingleton. Mr. Winston and I shall visit

you shortly at your home. We have your address from your records. With your fine cooperation, I feel we can have this matter taken care of before the bank closes this evening. Let me caution you first, ma'am, of one thing. It is of the utmost importance that you speak of this matter to no one until the investigation is completed. Mr. Winston was quite insistent that you promise not to talk. Not to neighbors, family, or friends. Of course, soon you will be able to surprise everyone with your adventure. But until then, the success of our investigation depends upon your absolute silence."

"I promise, Mr. Bennett. Not a word."

THE RUFFLED CURTAINS AT THE WINDOW OF THE FRAME
house fluttered as Charley and Tom braked to a stop at the curb. The door bounded open to frame a lady with darting china eyes and white hair pulled into a tight twist. A mirthful grin playing around her mouth showed she was working hard at this secret agent business. She was more enthusiastic than most, anxious to get on with it. All the better.

Charley had known before he ever set kid-skinned foot in Agnes Pingleton's house that it would be small and smell of stale sachet and old linoleum. It was also as neat as an embroidered pin cushion, except for the clutter of notions and small appliances. They, of course, represented years of birthday and Christmas gifts for a widowed granny. There was even a plump cat watching idly for rats through slitted eyes.

Mrs. Pingleton waited until the door was shut to speak. "I guess you're Mr. Bennett."

"Yes, Mrs. Pingleton. And this is Special Agent Winston." Charley paused while Tom flashed open a vinyl case with an impressively chromed badge. "What a lovely home you have."

The lady beamed. "Thank you."

Charley was watching the lady closely. One never knew when a job might go sour, as he knew from recent experience. She had sounded like a dead-solid sucker on the phone, but it never hurt to be extra careful dealing with strangers, to feel them out. He walked to an etagere laden with photos. "These handsome people your family?"

"Mostly." What was that shadow that flickered across her face? She skipped across the room to the etagere, and her rosy hand darted toward a framed eight-by-ten. Reaching for the photo, she clumsily knocked it over backwards. It crashed upside-down to the hardwood floor in a shower of glass shards. "Oh, my, I'm so clumsy in my old age. I was going to show you that picture of my old bridge partner, Edith. She was my sister-in-law, too. We used to compete all over the

state until she passed on five years ago. Well, never mind that mess. I'll clean it up later."

Charley decided that the old lady must have been nervous. That was good, actually. It made the pigeon easier to handle. They never questioned things when they were nervous. "They are a lovely family. I'll tell you, it makes my blood boil to think that one of our employees is stealing from folks like you. Well, let's get on with it. Agent Winston, would you please explain the Bureau's procedure for handling this kind of case to Mrs. Pingleton?"

Tom looked like his face would crack if he tried to smile. He was really quite good at this stage of the game. "Of course, ma'am, what you do is to take your savings book, go to the second teller's window inside the door, and withdraw some money. In order for this to work, it should be a sizable withdrawal—say thirteen thousand dollars. Leave the balance in your account to keep it open. Then, later in the day, return to the same teller and redeposit the money. If we are right in our preliminary investigation, that's when the teller will skim off some of the deposit. We will be monitoring the situation from within the bank, and we can make the arrest right after you leave. But, again, don't you worry a bit about your own safety or about your money. The federal government is underwriting the entire investigation and guarantees the safety of your money."

"As does the bank," agreed Charley. "Are we ready?"

"I'm sure ready," said Mrs. Pingleton. "I think it's high time the crook got what he deserves."

"Fine," said Charley. "Mr. Winston will meet you back here at"—he looked at his gold wristwatch,—"say three o'clock."

"This is going to be so exciting!" said Mrs. Pingleton looking up at him with a glitter in her eyes.

CHARLEY SAT IN THE PASSENGER SEAT OF THE VANILLA Ford sedan parked again at the curb in front of the small house. One of his regrets about the bank examiner—apart from the small potatoes payoffs—was that he had to use a car that was so dowdy. His tastes ran more to Eldos and Continentals than LTD's. The sedan's trunk was festooned with antennas, but there were no radios connected to them. Like Tom—more window-dressing. Behind the wheel, Tom looked at his watch for the fifth time in five minutes. "What the hell's going down with that old dame? She was supposed to be back here ten minutes ago."

Charley shivered with contempt. "You'll never make the big time if your feet don't warm up. Settle down and let the pigeon come to you.

Never get in a hurry—marks smell anxiety like I smell money.”

“I don’t know. Something seems screwy about this whole deal. That old lady seemed pretty sharp to me. She fell for the scam a little too quick.”

“If you’ll stop worrying and look down the street, you’ll see our pigeon coming now.” He straightened the carnation in his lapel. “Coming home to roost.”

As Charley had said, a rust-pocked, wheezing Corvair eased down the street in a wreath of blue smoke. It turned into the weedy driveway and settled into a comfortable spot by the house. Mrs. Pingleton lit from it and went inside. The men from the Ford followed and knocked on the door.

The lady answered immediately. “Oh, here you are, Mr. Bennett. Agent Winston. I did it! Just like you said.” Her face fell into a look of dismay. “I could hardly believe it.”

“Believe what, ma’am?”

“The second teller. It was Jane! She went to school with my nephew—they even dated!” Her expression changed as quickly to one much harder. “But, if it’s true that she’s stealing money, then she deserves whatever she gets. I think that stealing from an innocent old lady is a terrible crime. It could cause a body to drop over dead to lose all her money like that!”

“That’s right,” said Charley. “It’s hard to believe how cruel people can be. Er, you say you did exactly what Agent Winston said?”

“Yes, sir. I marched right into that bank and drew out thirteen thousand dollars without speaking to a soul, except to ask Jane for the money. I’ve got it right here in this sack in my purse.” She pulled out a folded lunchsack from her handbag. “I must say it’s making me awfully nervous to carry around so much money.”

Charley and Tom exchanged slight smiles. “You needn’t worry now, ma’am. Not with a banker and an FBI man right in your living room with you. If you like, Agent Winston and I will accompany you back to the front door of the bank for your protection.”

Charley was proud that Tom picked up his cue with hardly a lapse. Tom looked at his watch, saying, “I’m afraid it’s too late for that, Mr. Bennett. Doesn’t that branch close at three-thirty?”

“That’s right,” said Charley. “It’ll be too late by the time we get there. We’ll just have to finish up this matter tomorrow morning.”

“But, Mrs. Pingleton shouldn’t have to keep such a large sum of money overnight. I certainly wouldn’t want anything to happen to her money because of her good citizenship. Say! Why don’t you put it in the vault down at the main branch?”

Charley nodded his head vigorously. "Good idea. I'll write out a receipt, and you can be a witness."

"Oh, would you?" asked Mrs. Pingleton. "It would sure take a load off my mind to know my retirement fund is in a safe place."

"It will be my pleasure, ma'am," said Charley, already writing on the table next to the etagere. He finished signing it and handed it to Tom. Waiting for Tom to attest to the document, he noticed that the broken photo had been replaced on the shelf minus its glass cover. Two old ladies sat self-consciously behind a bridge trophy with their arms linked. Charley recognized one of the two as Mrs. Pingleton, but, strangely, the other lady—the one with blue hair—also seemed familiar. "The other lady in this picture—is she your sister?"

"No. Like I said the other day when I knocked the picture over, she was my sister-in-law."

"So you did. It's so strange. I feel like I've met her."

"Perhaps you did, Mr. Bennett, but it would have to have been at least five years ago. She's been dead that long. Have you lived around here that long?"

Charley realized tha the old woman was becoming very intense. "No, not quite that long. I don't see how we could ever have met." As he said it, Charley was sure that he had met the dead woman. But how? The only time he had ever been in the city was on that trip six years before, the last time he had played the bank examiner—

"Tom—uh, Agent Winston, we should be getting back to the bank so I can get this money in the safe."

The old lady was inching toward Charley. Her eyes glittered like Fourth-of-July sparklers. "Edith died when she lost all her money. It broke her heart. We told her we would take care of her, but she up and died because somebody she was trying to help abused her trust so bad. You want to know how she lost her money, Mr. Bennett?"

"I'd like to stay and chat, ma'am, but we really should be going. Perhaps you would prefer to keep your money here?"

The lady's look would have withered the cactus sitting on the windowsill. It took all of Charley's willpower not to run from the smothering room. "You're good, sir. Very good at what you do. But not as good as you think you are. You've got yourself fooled."

She broke away to walk to the front door. "I want you to meet someone else. Edith's boy, Frank, and some friends. After his mother died, he dropped out of college and went to work—for the police department. She jerked the door open to reveal three grim uniforms. "You had to come back, didn't you? You had to get greedy."

The hood wanted Sid to do a job for him. Sid didn't want to, but it looked like he didn't have any choice!

Ninety Days

by MEL WASHBURN

THE BIG GUY IN THE BLACK SUIT WAS CERTAINLY SURPRISED when Sid's knee slammed into his groin. Sid hated to have to hurt the guy, but what could he do? The guy was big and mean and his hands were throttling Sid's neck. So what else could he do?

The guy gasped when he was hit, then coughed and sort of folded up into a corner of the dark saloon. "I tried to hold him for you, Neph," he wheezed painfully. "I just about had him beat."

"Yeah, Herb, you did a great job," said a narrow man with black, greasy hair and too many teeth. "But this ain't the guy you were supposed to do it to." He looked Sid up and down. "I never seen this guy before. You made a mistake, Herb."

He flashed Sid a crooked grin. "My enforcer," he sneered. "Some enforcer, huh?"

"He does okay," allowed Sid, "for a big, clumsy guy."

The narrow man laughed appreciatively. "Just okay, huh? I'm glad you got a sense of humor, because I'd hate to have you mad at me, you're such a tough guy." Very tentatively, he laid a hand on Sid's arm. "I hope there's no hard feelings, anyway. Let me buy you a drink."

"I'm not thirsty."

"Well, let me buy you dinner then. You must get hungry sometimes, for a steak or something?"

"Yeah, I could use a square meal all right." Sid had been living on cigarettes and coffee for two days, and even on that diet he was just about broke.

THE NARROW MAN'S NAME WAS CHARLIE CASANTI, AND like his big enforcer, he wore a black suit. Though unlike the enforcer's, his suit fit him pretty well and was not second-coated with soup stains and grey lint. He took Sid outside, where they got into a long, black Lincoln and drove way out into the suburbs, to a little restaurant full of old ladies with silver hair and old gentlemen with stiff legs.

"Nobody knows me out here," confided Charlie Casanti, "but the food is okay."

"My mother would love this place," said Sid, looking around happily while Charlie ordered them a couple of steaks. They conversed lazily about sports and the weather, then Charlie got around to asking Sid about himself. "You're not from around here, huh?" he asked between mouthfuls of blood-red beef. "Just passing through, right?"

Sid nodded. "I'm going out west to see my mother. She's pretty sick."

"No ties here in the city? Nobody who knows you?"

"Well, you know me now, I guess."

"No I don't." Charlie grinned slyly. "I don't even know your last name. And I don't want to." He said Sid had impressed him, the way he'd handled big Herb. He asked if Sid always did that well in a scrape.

And Sid allowed that he usually did.

Then Charlie got to the nub of his discourse. "I guess you noticed, Herb called me 'Neph'? I get called that all the time, on account of I work for my uncle, Tough Tony Casanti. You never heard of him?"

"Never."

"Well, he's pretty big news in this city, at least on the west side. He's

a capo of the brotherhood . . . you know, the mob?"

Sid didn't say anything.

"They operate the rackets: the numbers, the slots, the speaks, some houses, that kind of thing. They bring in a lot of money, the brothers do, but it all goes out again. You know how many greaseballs in black suits my uncle's gotta support? Go on, whatta you guess? And remember now, this is just on the west side. There's two other families in the city." He leaned back and cocked an arm over the back of his chair. "How many do you guess?"

"I couldn't say."

Charlie leaned forward confidently. "Two hundred and seven! Most of them is worthless jerks, the reason they're in the rackets, they're too dumb to get an honest job. Like some of them, supposed to be loan sharks, they can't figure out the interest, (I swear I'm not lying) they lose money on the deal. Legitimate businessmen come to them, for Petessake, because they get a better percentage from them than they can from the banks. Nothing but a gang of foul-balls. You know what I'm saying?"

"You're saying these two hundred guys are a burden to your uncle. They're supposed to work for him, but actually he carries most of them."

"That's exactly right." Charlie's eyes snapped with indignation. "Exactly, they come around the house, hat in hand, they kiss the ring. 'Be healthy, godfather.' And they all want something. So my uncle gives 'em jobs, gives 'em cash. It's a constant drain. It just ain't profitable. And you know who's slated to take over the whole operation when my uncle retires? Can you guess?"

"Is it you?"

"Yeah." He nodded sadly. "It's like, every morning I get up, I think of those two hundred and seven guys, it makes me sick, I got to lay down again."

THEY ATE THEIR DESSERTS IN SILENCE AND WENT OUT TO
the car. "So, I see you got your suitcase there." It was a battered blue Samsonite, held together with furnace tape. You want a ride to the bus station or something?"

Sid felt embarrassed. "No, I can't afford . . . I mean, I'm traveling by thumb. If you could give me a lift out to the expressway . . ."

"By thumb?" Charlie asked sympathetically. "You that short of the green?" Sid nodded his head. "Well, hey, looka here. How about you do a little job for me before you leave? It'll get you a hundred bucks, you can buy a bus ticket and maybe a gift for your mother too."

"What sort of job?"

"A simple job. I take you over to my uncle's house, you pick up something there for me, but you don't let anybody see you do it."

"Like a burglary? No thanks. I don't steal."

"Hey, my uncle stole it from somebody else," insisted Charlie. "Besides, I already told you, everything he's got, it comes to me anyway. He don't have no wife or son."

"It still doesn't seem right." Sid picked up his suitcase and started to walk away.

"Hey, pal," said Charlie loudly. "I mean, that meal and everything, you owe me a little something."

"You're right, I do." Sid walked back to the car and tossed a crumpled Federal Reserve Note onto the front seat. "I hope ten bucks will cover it, because that's all I got." He walked away again.

FROM THE PARKING LOT OF THE SUBURBAN RESTAURANT you could see the overpass of an expressway about ten blocks off. Sid started walking. He stopped for a while and stuck out his thumb, but nobody picked him up, so he started walking again. But then right away he got a ride.

It was a suburban police car, squeaky clean and shiny new, with two young officers in clean, grey uniforms. "We got a complaint phoned in about you," they said. And they arrested him for vagrancy and a couple of other things.

The next day in municipal court, the judge said, "Ninety dollars or ninety days."

"My mother is sick, judge," explained Sid. "She's not likely to last ninety days. I wonder if I couldn't go see her first, then come back and do the time?" He knew the story sounded foolish, and he wished he had a better one, but it happened to be the truth.

The bailiff snickered. The judge suppressed a smile. "Your mother's sick?" he repeated incredulously.

"Yes she is. Honestly."

The judge frowned. "Spare me your lies, mister, and just serve your time like a man." He raised his gavel.

"A moment, please, your honor!" called a familiar voice from the back of the room. "I'll pay this man's fine."

And ten minutes later, Sid was a free man. "I owe you," he said as they got into Charlie's car, "even though I suspect you of phoning in the complaint on me in the first place."

"I never did that," said Charlie unconvincingly. "But you're right, you do owe me. So are you gonna do that little job for me? Or you

wanna try getting out of town again, with no money and no friends?"

"I guess I'll do the job. Just so I don't have to hurt nobody."

"Don't worry. The way I got it set up, you ain't gonna even see anybody, let alone hurt them."

It was simple. The Neph would provide a key to his uncle's house. All Sid had to do was go in, find a certain file cabinet in a certain room, take a leather satchel out of the cabinet, and bring it to the Neph. "I'll be waiting down the street in a car. You give me the satchel, I give you your pay. Simple huh?

"I'd even do it myself, except if my uncle caught me, he'd never rest until I was dead. I couldn't go far enough away. Nevada. Miami. It wouldn't matter. And on a contract like that, he don't use his own boys, he calls in the pros." He grinned reassuringly. "But you, don't worry. He don't know you from Adam. You're a drifter, come and gone. He writes it off to experience, changes the locks on his house. You dig?"

"I dig."

Charlie had switched cars since yesterday. He was now driving an older, slightly rusty sedan. "I stole this car especially for this job." He touched his forehead with two fingers and winked. "Always thinking."

HE DROVE BACK INTO THE CITY AGAIN, INTO AN OLDER neighborhood of modest homes with lots of trees and shrubbery. They cruised his uncle's house slowly, then parked down the street. "My uncle's out of town until late this afternoon. He's got a housekeeper, but today's her day off. The place is empty. Here's the key."

Sid tried to reason with Charlie one last time. "If you're going to inherit it all anyway, how come you want to rob your uncle? Can't you just wait?"

"No I can't. I'm the impatient type, see? And I'm getting very impatient with you right now."

"I see."

The key fit easily enough into the back door lock, and Sid very quickly found his way to the oak-panelled study with its heavy, old-world furniture, its odor of well-worn leather and stale tobacco smoke.

He went to the file cabinet behind the desk and slid open the bottom drawer, but there was no satchel inside, just a stack of old newspapers, a decanter of red wine, and some heavy, wine-stained crystal glasses.

"Damn," whispered Sid. Apparently the Neph didn't know as much about his uncle's affairs as he thought he did.

Sid's mind raced frantically. If there was wine stored in the file cabinet, then . . . he looked around the room until he saw a large,

black-oak armoire in the opposite corner. Hurriedly, he tried to open it up, but it was locked.

He went to the desk and rummaged through its drawers, looking for useful tools, and finally settled on a large paper clip, which he unbent into a crooked little wire, and a thin steel ruler. Then he returned to the armoire.

That wise-guy, overconfident Neph, he thought as he worked furiously at the lock. Sweat began to pour down his face, and his hands shook a little. This kind of fine work had always been hard for him. He drew a deep breath, wiped the sweat from his eyes, and peered at the lock, twisting and poking and prying at it.

"Who the devil are you?" asked a deep voice behind him. Sid turned to see a short, elderly man with a pot belly, double chins, and the fierce, grey eyes of an eagle. "What do you mean, coming in here?" he demanded irritably.

SID PUT HIS TOOLS DOWN AND STOOD UP. "MR. CASANTI?"

"Yeah, that's me." The old man closed the heavy oak door through which he had just come. "What are you, FBI or something? If you're looking for my tax records, I gotta tell you, all that's in that cabinet is liquor."

Sid took a couple of steps towards the old man, hoping to slip past him out the door. "I'm not with the FBI." He took a couple of more steps. "I'm not any kind of cop at all."

"Oh yeah?" The old man's face lit up with something like amusement. "Just a common thief, is that what you are?"

"No, I'm just a stranger. I came in the wrong house is all."

"That so? Well, you got to give me whatever you took before I can let you leave."

"I didn't take anything, that's the truth. Now please step aside."

"Sure. Sure I will. Just a second. I want to give you something so you don't have to steal any more." The old guy smiled agreeably and, reaching under his long, double-breasted suitcoat, felt around in his pants pockets. "I got it here somewhere." He smiled again, a too-toothy smile like his nephew's.

Keys and loose change jingled together in his pockets and then his hand came out, swift as a snake, with a leather blackjack which he swung at Sid's head. "Gotcha!" he cried exultantly.

But he was wrong. Sid blocked the jack with his forearm—though a streak of pain shot up to his shoulder and down to his wrist, numbing his entire arm.

The old man got set to strike again, but Sid threw himself forward

bodily and the two fell together in a tangle of arms and legs on the floor.

They wrestled and thrashed about, kicking and clawing and cursing at each other. The old man was determined and amazingly strong. And Sid's numb left arm didn't work very well. They rolled over and over on the thick carpet, bumping their heads, their elbows, and their shins on the furniture. Sometimes the old man was on top, and the next instant Sid was. And the old man was always chopping away with that blackjack, trying to get in the decisive blow.

But at last the feeling returned to Sid's arm and he was able to pin the old man to the floor. "If you give up," he gasped, "I promise I won't hurt you. So please give up."

"I never give up," the old guy growled, but after a few more rounds he did. "You're too strong for me," he almost wept in frustration. "I ain't so young any more." He let Sid tie him to a chair with electrical cords.

Then Sid went through the old guy's pockets until he found a heavy ring with about a hundred keys on it. "Sorry to have to do this," he said, "but I got a job to perform." And after trying fifteen or twenty keys, he found the one to unlock the big armoire.

And there, instead of dusty glasses and half-empty decanters, was a shiny, red-leather briefcase. "Hey, leave that alone," said the old guy forlornly. "It's nothing but personal papers in there."

But another key on the ring fit the briefcase, inside which were wads and wads of worn and greasy hundred dollar bills.

"IS THIS WHAT YOU WERE AFTER?" SID SHOWED CHARLIE the briefcase when he got back into the car.

"Yeah," grinned the Neph. "That's it." He put the rusty old sedan in gear and drove quickly down the street. Then he slid a brown paper envelope across the seat towards Sid. "There's a bonus there for you, two hundred bucks. And I'm forgetting about that other ninety I paid for your fine."

"Thanks a lot. Can you let me off at the bus depot now?"

"Bus depot?" Charlie snickered. "All that dough, I figure you can afford to fly. So I'm driving you to the airport."

He drove through quiet streets, then climbed an entrance ramp to the expressway. Traffic was thick, it being four o'clock, and Charlie became impatient. "Come on! Come on!" he muttered under his breath. He switched lanes rapidly, driving as fast as he could, standing on the accelerator, then stomping on the brakes.

"You're very impatient," said Sid. "That ain't good."

But Charlie just patted the red leather briefcase and laughed.

THEY GOT OUT TO THE SUBURBS, WHERE ROWS AND ROWS of tract housing stretched away in either direction as far as the eye could see. The expressway was clogged with commuters, and Charlie became even more impatient. He cursed. He honked the horn. And finally he passed on the outside, in the asphalt lane reserved for emergency parking.

Then he looked up in the rear view mirror. "Rats!" It was a state patrol car with its flashers rotating, red and blue.

Charlie pulled over to the curb. The cruiser sat behind them, the trooper talking into his radio handset, while the traffic rushed past, bumper to bumper, at fifty miles per. "Come on, you bird," muttered Charlie hotly. "Gimme the ticket and let's go."

But the trooper just sat impassively in his car, staring at them from behind dark blue sunglasses. He didn't move. He just sat there for the longest time.

"Come on!" Charlie tapped his fingers on the steering wheel.

"Maybe you should go back and talk to him," suggested Sid. "I read somewhere they like for you to do that."

"Yeah," Charlie brightened. "I think I read that too." He got out of the car.

But when the cop got out of his car and drew his gun, Sid realized things were not going to go well. He took the envelope with the \$200 and slid it under the seat on Charlie's side.

He heard the distant wail of sirens and pretty soon a half dozen state patrol and county sheriff's cars converged from every direction. A couple of them un racked their shotguns as they stepped from their cars. And they made Charlie lie on the pavement, spread-eagle. Then they made Sid lie down too.

It turned out that the computer had told the first cop that Charlie's car was stolen. "I didn't know you used computers for little stuff like stolen cars," whined Charlie.

"Then I guess you don't know everything, do you," quipped one of the troopers.

THEY TOOK THEM BOTH TO A SHERIFF'S SUB-STATION OUT by the airport, where they kept them in separate rooms so they couldn't conspire together. So Sid decided to stick to the truth, more or less. "I was just hitch-hiking," he told them.. "The guy picked me up, I don't know who he is."

The State Patrol sergeant laid a finger on the shiny red leather

briefcase. "This belong to you?"

"No, it doesn't."

"The guy who was driving, he says it's yours."

"Yeah, right." Sid touched his own battered blue Samsonite, held together with tape. "It's a matched set. You can tell."

The sergeant laughed and said that pretty soon they would let Sid go. "You should be more careful who you accept rides from. This guy you were with, he's a well-known mafia figure. And this briefcase here contains over a half-million dollars, all in greasy, wrinkled bills, no doubt the fruits of criminal activity."

"My goodness."

"And under the seat, he had a brown paper envelope with two hundred bucks in phony money."

"You don't say?"

The sergeant shrugged. "It's clumsy stuff, never get past a bank teller, but counterfeit nonetheless. You were sitting right next to twenty years in prison and didn't even know it."

"I certainly didn't," agreed Sid. Then they gave him his battered suitcase and let him go.

AS HE STEPPED OUT OF THE SUBSTATION, A BIG PLANE from the airport roared overhead. Sid looked wistfully up at it and wondered whether that funny money would have passed at the airport. Probably not. He walked a half-mile to the expressway on-ramp and stuck out his thumb.

And fifteen minutes later he got a ride in a shiny blue suburban police car with two young officers in blue uniform. "You got a complaint about me?" asked Sid.

"No," said the cops. "It's just that you were standing on the expressway, and that's against the law."

"How much against the law?"

"About ninety days."

"It figures." Sid used his one phone call to talk to his mom. She was feeling much improved, so he could take his time about getting home, she said. "I probably will take a little extra time, then," he told her. "See some places I haven't seen before."

"That sounds nice," his mom said.



Pedro was going to kill him, of that Ramon was certain. It would be no more difficult for him than killing the rabbit had been!

The Sidewinder

by D.L. CLAYTON

THE SAGUARO CACTUS WAS AT LEAST A HUNDRED YEARS old, Ramon thought as his eyes traveled up the ancient, scarred trunk. He placed a finger on one of the sharp spines and pressed downward until, with a faint snap, it broke in two. But spiny or not, the giant cactus at least cast a little shade.

The mid-morning sun had traveled far enough across the sky to expose his left leg to its burning rays. He moved his slim body over, but the gravelly soil was still hot and burned uncomfortably through his worn and faded jeans. He squirmed until he found a bearable spot, then gazed again into the distance, looking at his inward thoughts.

This same sun would be shining down on the other side of the border, he mused. But over there it would not be so merciless. Life would be better on the other side, and conditions would not be so harsh. It made him feel better to believe that.

He put up a slim brown hand and shaded his eyes from the glare of the sun. The heat waves shimmered over the landscape and blurred everything at a distance. He scrubbed at the grit that irritated his eyes and sighed tiredly. Along with the hot dry air that seared his nostrils came the pungent scent of dry and dusty sage.

He wondered how Maria and the children were getting along without him. He had been walking for two weeks now and his family had never been far from his thoughts. His heart ached to see Maria, to be with her, to hold her in his arms and to tell her that, soon now, they would have money and everything would be all right. That's what he would tell Maria. In reality he wasn't so sure.

He cast a troubled glance over at Pedro and the doubt in his mind grew stronger. He managed to cross himself, moving slowly, so that he couldn't call attention to himself.

"I do not trust this Pedro," Maria had spat out in contempt before he'd left home. "His eyes dart about as if he is afraid to let you look into them."

"That's only because he is shy with you, Querida. He knows you are a lady."

"Just the same, I don't trust him. I wish you wasn't going with him."

"I know. But I have to go. You know that. Besides, Pedro is the only one in the village who knows the way across the border."

"Oh Ramon, do you really think you can get a job once you are on the other side of the border?"

"We are only humble people," Ramon said thoughtfully. "We are not deserving of too great a fortune; but perhaps, just this once, God will smile on us and let me get a job."

Doubt and worry drew Maria's brows together. "Do you really think it will come true?" she asked. Her dark eyes rose to meet his.

"I will make it come true, *mi amor*." He took her in his arms and held her close. "But it's going to be difficult being away from you for such a long time."

"Oh Ramon, I wish you didn't have to go. What will I do all that time without you?"

"We will both have to work very hard to make the time go faster. But soon I will have a job, and I will send you money. When we have enough to buy the shop, I will come back home to stay."

RAMON BROKE OFF HIS THOUGHTS AND SAT UP STRAIGHT. He stared across the scrubby sage to where Pedro was behaving strangely. He was standing still, staring intently at something on the ground. In his upraised hand was a stick, gnarled and crooked, and forked on one end.

Ramon got to his feet. At first he could see nothing. Then a slight movement caught his attention and he saw that it was a snake, a sidewinder. It lay coiled with its head drawn back, ready to strike at the enemy that towered so far above.

It never had a chance. With a shout of triumph, Pedro brought the stick down and neatly pinned the scaly head between the forks. The snake writhed and wriggled and curled in every conceivable contortion, but it could not escape. Pedro dug into the pocket of his dirt-encrusted jeans and brought out a pocket knife. It was obviously his proudest

possession. He touched a button and a six-inch blade flashed into view.

Ramon never failed to flinch when he saw that blade spring open. And Pedro knew it. He took a perverse delight in opening and closing it when he knew Ramon was watching. Ramon had good reason to quail at the sight of the blade. He had known from the beginning that Pedro was brutal and cruel, but it wasn't until he'd killed the rabbit that Ramon realized how much he enjoyed it. He suppressed a shudder as he remembered how Pedro had taken his time, torturing the animal, finally letting it die in agony.

He watched now as Pedro placed the blade at the back of the snake's head. Their eyes met briefly as Pedro glanced up to watch Ramon's reaction. He pressed down, and with one long slow stroke severed the head from the body.

He tossed a look of sly amusement in Ramon's direction and kicked the head to one side. He chuckled as he pierced the wildly contorting body with his knife and held it up over his head.

"Dinner," he announced triumphantly. "Get a fire going, Ramon. At last we eat."

Ramon gathered some wood and succeeded in getting a fire started. His eyes were drawn repeatedly to where Pedro was preparing the snake. He had placed it on a large rock and was holding it down while he sliced the skin the full length of the body.

He was making little sounds in his throat, half talking, half laughing, gloating over his kill. He grasped the skin at the neck and slowly peeled it downward.

As the white meat became exposed to the sun, the flies began to gather. He struggled to wrap the meat around the stick but a muscle twitched now and then and made it difficult. Ramon was repulsed by Pedro's filthy hands sliding over the meat. He was glad when the task was done. Finally the meat lay slack, conforming to the curves of the stick. Pedro placed it over the fire.

As the smoke drifted up over the meat, the flies reluctantly withdrew, then darted in again and again, trying to get to the meat. Finally, they withdrew, circling, waiting their chance.

Unperturbed, Pedro slowly turned the meat. His thick lips moved as he watched the smoke caress the meat. Once a trickle of saliva escaped the corner of his mouth and he licked at it in greedy anticipation.

Ramon added more sticks to the bed of coals, being careful not to raise any ashes. The flames rose and the meat began to sizzle. He wondered how he could avoid eating contaminated meat and still get something inside his empty stomach. He did not mind eating rattlesnake meat, but what he did mind was the fact that it wasn't

washed. It's true they had very little water left, but to keep from getting sick, they should have spared enough to wash the meat.

He thought of Maria, how meticulously clean she was. When he saw her again he would tell her about Pedro.

"He never washes his hands," he would complain. "Several times we came across a stream, but he didn't take a bath or wash his clothes. He's as filthy as a pig."

"You should not have gone with him," Maria would say. "It would have been better to have found another way."

"There was no other way, *mi bida*. It was my only chance to get across the border."

RAMON BROUGHT HIS ATTENTION BACK TO THE FIRE. IT was burning low and he carefully laid more sticks on the coals. He pretended he didn't notice that Pedro was watching him.

"I should charge you for the meat, *amigo*," Pedro chuckled. "If it weren't for me, you would not be eating today."

"*Si*," Ramon said amiably. "I will owe you for many things." It was best to be agreeable, but he knew by now that Pedro intended to demand more money from him than they'd agreed on. He wondered if Pedro knew about the few pesos he carried in his jeans. He touched his pocket where the money lay hidden. It wasn't much, only what his cousin in El Paso could afford to send him, but he quailed at the thought of anyone trying to take it away from him. The lives of all his loved ones depended on those few pesos.

When the meat was finally done, Pedro removed it from the fire. Squinting against the smoke, he placed the blade of his knife in the center of the stick and cut through both the meat and the wood. He handed half of it to Ramon. They were silent as they hungrily picked at the tender meat.

Ramon became aware, after a while, that Pedro was watching him. He glanced up and felt a shock as he saw a wide grin on Pedro's face. He searched his memory. Had Pedro said something to him? He lowered his eyes in confusion. There was still some meat clinging to the stick. He understood then. He had been peeling off the dirty outer layer, eating only what was underneath. Pedro obviously found that amusing.

He glanced up at a movement and saw that Pedro was wiping the long blade of his knife on the shiny surface of his jeans. He stared in fascination as Pedro folded it up and slipped it into his pocket, then with a smile of satisfaction, grunted, and went back to eating.

Ramon flushed. "How much further, my friend?" he asked by way

of diversion. Everything might depend on his being open and friendly.

"A few more days perhaps," Pedro growled over a mouthful of food.

Ramon forced his eyes away from his grubby companion and squinted against the sun. "We have very little water left. We will have to get there soon."

Pedro did not answer. The silence grew long and Ramon became aware of an uneasy tension. He glanced up and saw Pedro's eyes sliding away from him. He became instantly alert. Ramon thought of the knife in Pedro's pocket and how easy it would be to flip it open and slide the blade into his heart. It would be no more difficult than killing that rabbit. Or the snake. He suppressed a shudder and lowered his eyes to keep Pedro from guessing what was on his mind.

The tension grew as the silence stretched on. Ramon got up and casually moved toward some shade. He thought of the helicopter that had come flying over yesterday and glanced upward, scanning the skies. If another one came flying over today he wouldn't try to hide from it like he did yesterday.

Pedro had seen the helicopter first. It had approached from the north, flying low. Pedro had given a startled shout for Ramon to take cover, then made a wild dash to a nearby arroyo where he squeezed himself under a shallow ledge and lay still. Ramon had curled up next to a large rock and pulled sage brush over himself. They had remained perfectly still as the helicopter made two passes over the area, then moved on toward the west.

Remembering the helicopter, Ramon suddenly realized they must be nearer the border than he thought. But instead of a lift of his spirits he was filled with terrible dread. His heart squeezed in fear as he realized that if Pedro was going to rob him or kill him, it would have to be now! The thought of his family flashed through his mind and he resolved that Pedro was not going to get the best of him.

He tried to think of a way to overpower him, but he knew it wasn't possible. Pedro outweighed him by at least fifty pounds. He was also taller and stronger. In addition to that, the lack of food for the past three days had weakened Ramon considerably. But there was no hope that it might also have weakened Pedro. His loss of weight only seemed to make him more agile.

SUDDENLY, PEDRO'S STILLNESS WAS MORE THREATENING than any move he could have made. For a moment Ramon was paralyzed with fear. He knew exactly how that snake must have felt when he saw Pedro towering over him.

He tried to appear casual as he got up and moved farther away. He made a show of brushing off his clothes, but his eyes were darting over the ground, looking for something to use as a weapon. At the same time, he knew with sinking heart, that his life would have to depend more on cunning than force, and his spirits plunged. He could not think of a single thing to do in his own defense.

He glanced upward in supplication. Had God brought him all this way only to abandon him to this brute? He tried to feel God's presence, but incredibly, it seemed God had diverted His attention at that moment and did not know he was in trouble. In his moment of shock, Ramon knew exactly how Jesus had felt in His last moment on the cross. Forsaken.

He threw a hasty glance at Pedro and froze. There was a growing menace in his attitude, and a terrible glint of anticipation in his eyes! He began to advance. His gaze never wavered from Ramon's paralyzed form.

The naked blade of the knife glinted in the sun. Ramon's heart leapt to his throat. He turned and fled. He heard Pedro's laugh behind him and knew he'd lost the race before it began. Reason gave way to panic as his feet flew over the ground. He leapt over sagebrush, dodged cactus and darted around rocks. He was terrified that he might stumble and fall.

He heard a shout, loud and angry, and cast a frantic glance behind him. Pedro had fallen, hard. Ramon saw the dust fly as Pedro's weight skidded over the ground. But he knew that it would only knock the wind out of him and in a moment he would be up and running again.

Ramon's sense of self-preservation kept him going. He tried to judge how far he could run before he either dropped from exhaustion or Pedro caught up with him. To that rise in the distance, he judged. It would not be possible to run any farther than that.

His legs had begun to falter when he felt a surge of adrenalin course through his body. He put on a new burst of speed, but he knew it wouldn't last long. As he reached the base of the rise, his heart was straining painfully. He cast a quick glance behind him and struggled on a few more feet before he realized that Pedro was not behind him. He staggered on to the top of the rise and came to a stop. He sucked great gasps of air into his straining lungs as his eyes searched frantically over the landscape. Pedro was nowhere in sight.

It was a trick, Ramon told himself. Not that it mattered. He could run no farther anyway. The stifling heat burned his lungs and made it even more difficult to breathe. As Ramon began to search for some shade, he saw Pedro. He was lying on the ground, some distance back.

Ramon, still gasping for oxygen, remained alert, prepared for treachery. He stood watching for a long time, but Pedro did not move. Ramon sank down on a rock, his eyes never wavering from the still form. Finally, in desperate need of shade, he pulled up a sage brush and held it over his head and continued to watch.

Suddenly Pedro moved, and Ramon was instantly on his feet. But before he could gather his forces to run, he realized that Pedro was behaving strangely. He watched as Pedro drew his legs up, then jerked them down again. He was also flinging his arms about as if struggling to get up.

Ramon's fear was replaced by curiosity. Instinct told him that Pedro was no longer a threat, but he sat back down on the rock and waited. Finally, when Pedro did not move, he got up and took a hesitant step back down the rise, then another. Presently he was cautiously retracing his steps.

He advanced to within a hundred yards of Pedro's inert figure and came to a stop. To his horror, Pedro began to stir. He pushed his shoulders up off the ground then collapsed again. This time there was no further movement.

A shadow passed overhead and Ramon glanced upward. A buzzard was circling high in the sky, drifting in large, lazy circles. Ramon instantly understood the significance of the bird and jerked his attention back to the inert body in stunned disbelief.

A sudden breeze tugged at his sweat-soaked shirt. In spite of the heat, Ramon could not control the shiver that shook his thin frame. He sat down on a rock, still holding the sage brush over his head. He was breathing easier now. His shirt had begun to dry, leaving large, white patches of salt residue. He sat there for a long time, studying the lifeless body, trying to understand.

He became aware that another buzzard had joined the first, circling high, while the first one had drifted lower. It spiraled lazily in inquisitive investigation.

RAMON COULD NO LONGER DOUBT IT, PEDRO WAS DEAD. He got up and went over to the body. Had he died of a heart attack? he wondered. Ramon did not know about such things, but it hardly seemed likely. He paused for only a moment before he gingerly turned the body over. That's when he saw it, the two small puncture wounds on the wrist. A trickle of blood had oozed out and dried there.

Ramon squatted beside the body and stared at the twin punctures in astonishment. The flesh was swollen and discolored. He glanced back down the trail, then slowly got to his feet and began to retrace Pedro's

footsteps. He came to the place where he had fallen. The signs were easy to read. Pedro's heavy body had left a solid imprint. At the end, where the outstretched arm would have been, lay the head of the sidewinder, its jaws still open, the poison sacs just behind the fangs quite empty.

Ramon looked skyward in abject apology. He dropped to his knees and spent the next half hour begging God to forgive him for his unbelief.

MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAKERS

D.L. Clayton (*Sidewinder*):

When I was six years old and living in Southern Texas with my large family (7 children), my father killed a large diamond-back rattlesnake. He cut off its head, but before he buried it he wanted to show us kids what the fangs looked like. He pried the mouth open with two sticks. The muscles in the severed head contracted, and I saw a thin stream of yellowish venom shoot out in a small arc. In my story I turned that diamond-back into a sidewinder and put it in the path of two Mexicans trying desperately to get across the border.

I am a sixty-two-year-old retiree (refugee from a Government office where I wrote contracts) who finally has time to write full time. I am married, have three grown sons, the youngest of which is my best critic. I have finally settled in Bremerton, Washington, which is about as far as you can get (and still be in the U.S.) from Sinton, Texas, the small town near the Mexican border where I was born.

Out of the dozens of evening courses I have attended, one stands out as the best. It was at the College of San Mateo in California, where our teacher drummed into us plot, characterization, timing, mood, and all the other elements of a story, for which I am profoundly grateful. Thanks, Mrs. Boggus.

The creatures were all over her—in her hair, on her face, everywhere—and any movement she made meant instant death!

WASPS

by JAMES GRAY

WALTER BRIGG'S SCHEME FOR COMMITTING THE PERFECT murder kindled the day he met Amanda Brentwood. Walter worked as a clerk at the dispensing pharmacy at the University Medical Center. His duty was to accept the prescriptions, seeing to it that the physicians had filled in all the required information, and looking after such details as the addresses. His ears perked when he heard where this particular young lady lived.

"464 Devonshire Road. Burnal Heights. Number 6."

Burnal Heights! Devonshire Road! In that section of the city you were talking money. Walter cocked an appraising eye on the patient. She was gaunt and sallow, her eyes dark rims, her lips thin and rather tight. She appeared a sick, sad, and indeed, a *lonely* girl. Considering her address, Walter was surprised at her plain print dress and unbecoming hairstyle. He glanced at her prescription. It was for an insect sting kit. Interesting. She was an allergy patient.

He struck up a conversation. "Beautiful weather, isn't it."

Her strained, shy smile was not lost on him.

"You have a lovely smile," he lied with disarming sincerity, sensing at once that she was not accustomed to complements, certainly not from men, especially handsome men. And Walter was strikingly handsome. Amanda noticed, and blushed, stammering an abrupt, "Thanks."

"Come here often?" Walter inquired gracefully.

Her fingers trembled nervously at the hair behind her ear. "Why, yes. I come to the allergy clinic and to the cardiac clinic and . . ." She dropped her eyes bashfully. ". . . the gynecological clinic."

"I see. Your husband with you?"

"Oh, I'm not married."

"A pretty girl like you! Hard to believe."

She blushed even redder, more than a trifle interested in this handsome young man. "I haven't seen you here before. Are you a pharmacist?"

"No," Walter replied truthfully, adding an expedient lie. "I'm studying to become one."

"A young man on the way up," she commented.

Walter grinned, but offered no denials.

That afternoon, on his break, Walter sauntered down to the Medical Records Department in the basement. He knew the clerk there, and had no trouble convincing her to allow him a peek at the file of one Amanda Brentwood, purely on pharmacy business, of course. He found what he expected to find. Amanda was hypersensitive to wasp venom. She had been stung when three, and had gone into anaphylactic shock, a life threatening reaction in which the victim suffers plunging blood pressure, labored breathing, and a racing heartbeat. Fortunately, her mother had been present and had rushed Amanda to a hospital. It had been touch and go whether she could make it. Her sensitivity was found to be so acute a single sting might produce death. Moreover, her heart was weak, which made her condition even more perilous. She was unlikely to survive the trauma of being stung again, except with an immediate injection of the adrenalin in the bee sting kit, followed by prompt medical attention.

Reading the file, Walter was fascinated.

He decided to get to know her better.

HAVING HER ADDRESS, HE FREQUENTED THE RESTAURANTS and bars near her apartment. He had no luck, for Amanda rarely socialized. In the end, he resorted one night to following her at a discreet distance. She led him to a small movie house specializing in revivals. Walter managed to look surprised when he bumped into her in the lobby.

"Well, Amanda. How are you? You a Keaton buff too?"

"Why, yes."

"Alone tonight?"

"Well, yes, I . . ."

"Had a spat with the boyfriend, eh? Happens. I'm between steadies myself. Wouldn't want to sit with me, would you?"

"I would like to very much, Walter."

His complacent smile greeted her eager one. The lonely ones were always the easiest to snare.

From then on, he had smooth sailing. Amanda's parents were dead, which removed one possible source of skepticism. Amanda herself had few friends, none men, and reclusive habits. She had never before been showered with masculine attentions, and she quickly succumbed to Walter's overtures. After only six weeks, they were married.

Now Walter was where he wanted to be. He played the devoted husband with panache, moving his wife into a modest third-floor apartment near the University. Walter told Amanda he wanted her at hand, in case of emergency. She was flattered, not at all minding the cramped living quarters. Indeed, she found it romantic to share his meager means as he worked his way up in the world. And the fact that they lived in such a spartan manner convinced her that Walter was uninterested in her money. That doubt had gnawed at her during the whirlwind courtship. Now she gladly surrendered her business affairs to him, and he soon pulled her baroque financial holdings into one neat bundle, finding her to be even wealthier than he had anticipated, with a net worth of over three million. Walter was proud of himself. He even considered not murdering her. After all, she was in frail health, and he was still young. He could wait. But Walter wanted the high life that her money would bring *right now*, and he didn't relish being tethered another instant by fidelity. Yet who knew what might happen if he stumbled one night while out prowling? Even in this liberated age, what size settlement would a judge award a philandering husband out of a sick wife's family fortune? No, it was prudent to proceed with the murder.

He began by reading everything he could on wasps, learning that wasps vary significantly in their ability and willingness to sting, crucial information, for he would need an aggressive species. One by one he weighed the possibilities—the scolid wasps, the digger wasps; the vespid wasps, the savage tarantula hawks—focusing on the ubiquitous yellow jackets and hornets, for these were more likely to nest near man's dwellings, thus arousing fewer suspicions. He selected the sandhills hornet, a common species noted for vicious and repeated stinging when its nest is disturbed. Furtively purchasing a beekeeper's gloves and net, he hiked into the countryside one Friday, ostensibly on a field trip. He discovered a nest under the eave of a long deserted shack. Waiting until nightfall, when the wasps became placid, he broke the nest down into a shoebox.

He was ready.

Tomorrow Amanda would die.

THAT SATURDAY, WALTER AWOKE IN A JOYOUS MOOD.

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The shoebox containing the wasps was secreted under the back seat of his Buick. He shared breakfast with Amanda, chatting gaily, exchanging gossip about the neighbors, before retiring to the parlor to read the morning paper. It was almost time. He knew Amanda's habits to a tee. She would clean off the table, becoming rapidly fatigued, and then return to bed for a long morning nap.

She would awaken to a most unpleasant surprise.

Walter's nerves were shot. He tensed at the clinking dishes, glancing incessantly at his watch, until finally Amanda padded in and kissed him warmly on the cheek.

"Love you," she whispered. "Going to take a nap."

He reciprocated the kiss. "Sweet dreams."

He allowed her ten minutes and then crept into the bedroom and found her sound asleep. As it was a sultry morning, Amanda had shoved the blankets into a pile at the side of the bed. Walter tiptoed soundlessly to the bed and scooped up the bedding, then slunk over to the dresser. He found her bee sting kit inside her purse. He took the purse and the kit with him into the hall, dropping them and the blankets into a heap. Returning, he shut and locked the bedroom window. All was ready, Amanda still asleep. Careful not to make a sound, Walter slipped down the stairs and out to his Buick. After sliding the shoebox under his jacket, he scurried back up to his apartment. This was the most dangerous moment. If a neighbor spotted him, there might be embarrassing questions later. But no one saw him. Once inside, he pulled on the gloves and the net, then silently eased the bedroom door to within inches of closing. Opening the box, he flipped the nest onto the rug. Wasps swirled angrily as Walter shut the door.

Straightening, he dropped the net and gloves onto the heaped blankets. His final step was to lock the bedroom door from the outside with the only key, leaving Amanda no escape, before he departed to establish his alibi. When he returned, he assumed it would be to find his wife dead.

AMANDA AWOKE TO THE BUZZING, THINKING IT AT FIRST to be a nightmare. She was lying flat on her back on the bed, with wasps swarming about her. One was crawling on her arm. Another alighted on her cheek, and she sensed the ticklish itch of its feet as it crawled down her jaw and onto her neck. My God! she thought. This couldn't be happening! But it was. Hundreds of wasps whirled about the room, skittering across the ceiling, plunking up and down the window panes. She tried to cry out for Walter, but terror muted her

voice. She tried again and again, at last mustering a rasping whisper. "Walter! Walter!" He did not answer. She lay, unable to twitch a muscle, afraid even to blink, lest the ripple of skin startle the wasp into stinging. Her throat went dry, her breath going choppy, her heart pounding, sweat pouring out. Oh, where was Walter? He would miss her and come soon. Out of the bottom of her eye she spotted the closed door. Funny. She did not remember shutting it. Without twisting her head, she glanced at the dresser. Her purse was missing. She must have left it in the parlor. And where was the bedding? she was about to call out again when another wasp landed on her chin, inching up to her lips, terrifying her to silence.

WALTER STOOD ON THE SIDEWALK BELOW, GLANCING straight up at the bedroom window. His eyes were keen. Even at three stories distance, he could make out the dark specks flitting along the glass. Pausing for only an instant, he loped across the street. She might scream any second, but it would do no good if he were alone and unseen. He wanted an alibi. He hurried into the open door of Grady's Tavern, directly opposite her apartment, and slid onto the stool at the near end of the bar, from where he could see to the window. With luck, his wife's shadow would darken the lace curtains when she jumped off the bed. Certainly he would hear her scream. All he had to do now was wait, making sure he rushed back to the apartment and entered before the neighbors, to don the net and gloves, and open the bedroom window. The purse and the kit and the bedding would be returned as if nothing had happened. The nest would be flushed down the john. Everyone would assume the wasps flew in the window. Who would suspect foul play? Walter ordered a glass of beer and drank heartily, indulging himself a smug smile, as the jukebox at the rear of the bar bleated with Tammy Wynette warbling "Stand By Your Man."

WALTER FINISHED HIS SECOND BEER. A HANDFUL OF regulars were slumped against the bar, staring at the Saturday morning roadrunner cartoons, chatting aimlessly about the pennant races, Walter casually injecting a comment now and then, while keeping his eyes glued, as much as possible, to the bedroom window. He had noticed nothing. Yet what if she had come around? He had assumed she would panic when she awoke and run screaming for the door, inciting the wasps into a stinging frenzy. Now another scenario suggested itself. *Maybe she had died of terror!* Of course. Imagine the strain on her heart when she awoke amid a cloud of wasps. He grinned. She probably died instantly, right on the bed, without even being stung.

It would be perfect. He would need no messy explanations about where the wasps had come from, and about why his wife had died without injecting adrenalin. Yes, he mused, she was certainly dead by now. But best wait a tad longer. He ordered another round for everyone.

THE BUZZING GREW DESULTORY. FOR THE FIRST TIME, Amanda raised her head slowly, barely an inch, shifting her eyes to peer at the door. She spied the pocked nest on the rug. How could that have gotten in here? It was impossible. This had to be a horrible nightmare, and yet she knew she was awake. She had contemplated sliding off the bed and inching toward the door, but now the wasps were congregating by their nest. Escape in that direction was impossible. She rolled her head slightly, glancing at the window. It was closed, though she distinctly remembered having left it open. And what about Walter? She called out, louder this time.

"Walter!"

No answer.

Louder.

"Walter!"

Nothing.

"For heaven's sake, help me!"

Silence.

It dawned on her. Walter was not here. He must have gone out. Sure, and then a malignant intruder had slipped into the apartment with the nest of wasps. At her outcries, the air buzzed again, wasps darting about the panes, gliding along the ceiling, shrouding the bed in a swirling yellow mist.

A new wave of horror seized her.

What if Walter hadn't gone out?

What if the intruder had overpowered Walter and . . . ?

What if Walter were dead?

Or worse!

He might be lying in the parlor in a pool of blood!

She had to help him. Slowly she lifted her torso, the bedsprings creaking. The wasp on her arm did not sting, but instead took flight, soaring to the ceiling. There was no way for her to sneak past the nest to the door, but she might be able to summon help from the window. So, with infinite slowness, she straightened, twisting her legs off the mattress, digging her toes into the rug, rising to her feet. This movement, normally completed in seconds, took minutes. But at last she was upright. Now she must reach and open the window, to shout for help.

WALTER GULPED HIS THIRD GLASS OF BEER, THEN PUSHED off the stool. He had missed the painful, glacially slow movements inside the window, having long concluded that Amanda was dead. Now all that remained was to return to the apartment, to slip on the net and gloves, and dispose of the nest, swishing away the wasps with a broom. Then he would be free to howl with grief, alerting the neighbors, who would arrive to find him tearfully cradling his wife's corpse. He padded across the pavement, rolling his plan over in his mind. He must be convincing. Without thinking, his lips puckered, and he broke into a jauntily whistled rendition of "Nearer My God to Thee."

LIKE OVERLY STRETCHED BARBED WIRE, AMANDA SNAPPED all at once. She began edging toward the window. The wasps swooped past her face, droning nearer and nearer. Frightened, she froze, fighting to steady herself against the insects swirling like dive-bombing jets, until quite suddenly she bolted, as a terrified rabbit bolts when confronted with a predator. She rushed wildly toward the window, feeling tiny bodies splat against her torso, but moving too fast to be stung. In a frantic leap, she crashed into the glass.

THE MILLING THRONG MURMURED AS THE GURNEY BEARING the sheetcovered corpse rattled across the sidewalk. Strong-armed attendants gently hoisted it up and into the open doors. A moment later, the doors slammed shut and the ambulance rumbled away, without the siren or flashing lights of its sister vehicle minutes earlier. A policeman lumbered back and forth by the scene of the tragedy, scattering the crowd. "Okay, folks. It's all over. Go home, now. Nothing more to see."

The bartender Grady was one of the last to leave, waddling across to his tavern, where his ashen-faced customers waited by the door.

"Damnedest thing," he muttered.

"Anyone figure out what happened?" one of the men asked.

"Wasps up in the apartment. The girl was allergic, you know. She went crazy and jumped right through the window."

The man shook his head. "Ain't it the worst. Such a nice young couple, too. And only an hour ago Walter was setting 'em up for us."

"Ya, the poor devil. His wife will live, but she's grief stricken. She landed smack dab on top of him. Broke her fall, and his neck." •

He took the medieval weapon from its case, stood in the center of the room, let his arm gently fall back, then drew it smoothly forward in a motion that caused the spiked ball to snap like a shot at the end of its chain. It was strange: he knew exactly how to use the deadly instrument!

Giles' House

by JEFFREY GODDIN

JOSHUA IRVING STOOD AT THE WIDE CASEMENT WINDOW, looking down at the main street—old Mass. Highway 1—of New Johnsport. Across the street Mrs. Potter, elegant, white-haired, appeared on her second story balcony and greeted him with a controlled Eastern nod. Even if he were an outsider, to have acquired such a house as Joshua now owned was accomplishment enough for a greeting.

It was a grand house, built by a rich merchant of the late eighteenth century. As with several of the huge white houses on the street, it was solidly George Washington Federal, from the wide hipped roof down to the black painted window shutters.

A chill Autumn breeze slipped through the window. Joshua ran a hand over his thinning black hair and sighed, drew the dressing gown a bit more snugly around his growing paunch. He stroked his stomach ruefully. The fat price of success!

He turned back into the room. There, in the large mahagony four-poster, lay Christine, his wife of five years. So young she looked! But then, she *should* look young. Five years before, he'd committed the traditional folly of slowly aging English professors—falling in love with a graduate student. He'd plucked her, at age twenty, from a seminar on Donne, and after a beautifully carnal trip to the Bahamas had taken her to be his lawfully wedded wife.

A folly. They'd been happy at first, so happy! He was the father she'd always dreamed of, she his Beatrice, and love and lust had given birth to a deeper friendship—at least, on his part.

But through the years, as his writing had proven more lucrative, he'd gratefully phased away from the University, giving them more time together. He was approaching his forty-fourth birthday, she her twenty-seventh. It was becoming more and more apparent that they were, indeed, of different generations, particularly in the intensity of their passions.

Joshua shrugged, and lightly kissed her auburn curls. He loved her, though he feared to truly trust her. For one thing, she was spending too much time with an actor from the local amateur theatrical, where she had become a star of sorts.

But jealousy . . . Ah, jealousy! It wasn't the first time, nor the last, probably, that she'd given him cause. He tried to think of something appropriate from Shakespeare as he went down to make breakfast.

At the sunny kitchen table, Boston paper and coffee in hand, he reflected that he'd become much less a part of the little Massachusetts community than had she. She acted, belonged to local clubs. She even took a class twice a week at the local junior college.

And he? He was content to have the grand old house, a lovely young wife, and his writing, which seemed to be steadily more successful as the years progressed.

Joshua finished breakfast and put the dishes in the sink. It seemed to be hard to get motivated this morning. As he climbed the stairs, his hand glided lovingly over the curved maple banister. Mine, he thought. This fine house, mine.

He quietly got dressed. Christine was still dozing, her knees drawn up to her chin, and he did not disturb her. He descended to the parlor and left a note that he was going out for a walk.

THE DAY WAS BRISK, BRIGHT, CLOUDLESS, THE KIND OF day New England turns up perhaps once every week or two in the Fall, warm in the sun and cool in the shade. He thrust his hands in the pockets of his London Fog and decided to take a stroll down by the

wharf.

This was his favorite part of town. The old houses and shops along the street adjacent the waterfront had been restored with the help of a Federal grant and much hard work. Since 1970, perhaps two thirds of the buildings had been refurbished and adapted to the needs of the more recent settlers—and, of course, the tourists.

He walked the red brick cobbles, beneath hanging iron signs that announced dealers in handmade jewelry, scrimshaw, houseplants, imported china. There was even a new little coffee shop where one could sit and have mocha and croissants.

The street opened out into Grammary Square, where several late season tourists were tossing bread and corn to the flock of seagulls and pigeons that seemed to always be there.

And then it happened, the little incident that was to spoil Joshua's lazy morning walk. Strolling whistling across the square, his hands thrust deep in his chinos, was the tall dark-haired actor, Derek Malden, whom Christine spent so much time with.

In a moment he would see Joshua, smile a toothy smile, and attempt to engage him in conversation. It was the last thing Joshua needed.

On a sudden impulse, he turned and plunged into the half-light of an alley between two shops.

The space was narrow, not even room for a delivery truck, though there was a pile of cardboard cartons with "Earthborn Pottery" stamped on the sides. Joshua hurried down the alley, the breeze bringing him the salt smell of the wharf ahead.

Then, the horror. He heard footsteps crunching behind him. It could only be Malden, determined on some perverse whim to take the same alley.

Joshua emerged on River Street, so named because the Oshalet River, actually a creek, drained into the harbor nearby. He looked frantically to right and left, feeling foolish, and saw, just a few yards away, a hanging sign: VERGIL LEVY, BOOKSELLER.

And why not? Joshua pushed open the old oaken door and stepped inside. As the door closed behind him he let out a deep breath and closed his eyes, feeling utterly ridiculous. He hoped the younger man had not really seen him. Why was he so reluctant to face this fellow? After all, if his suspicions were true, he, Joshua, was the aggrieved party.

HE OPENED HIS EYES AND LOOKED AROUND. THE PLACE was a storybook classic of an antiquarian bookstore. The sign had looked new, but surely this place had been here for centuries. It *smelled*

old, a smell of leather and cats and mildew. The walls were lined with floor-to-ceiling shelving, and several dark hardwood standing shelves were set diagonally across the corners so that a person could walk behind them. A fairly modern florescent fixture hung from the ceiling, providing vague, diffuse illumination.

Directly ahead, at a large reddish mahogany desk flanked by two more free standing shelves, sat a tall, white-haired man. He was bending close over an old leatherbound volume carefully propped under a green-shaded lamp. He'd barely looked up when Joshua entered. Now he fixed his visitor with a steady gaze through thick bifocals and slowly got to his feet, a look of amazement on his face.

"My God!" the man said in a rich tenor voice, "My living God!"

Joshua stared, then looked quickly over his shoulder to see if something worthy of such an exclamation, say a giraffe in a sombrero, had followed him into the shop. But no, there was nothing behind him.

"Amazing," the man said, more calmly.

Joshua smiled, and gave a little bow. "I'm afraid I've rarely been accused of even saintliness, much less godliness. My name's Joshua Irving, and I'm a writer. Do I, by any chance, remind you of someone?"

The man stood and walked forward to meet Joshua, still staring intently. "No," he said, almost to himself, "the eyebrows are just a bit too thick, the underlip a shade too thin. But really, the resemblance is amazing!"

"Resemblance to whom?"

"Why, to Giles de Retz, a gentleman of the late eighteenth century!"
Joshua gave a start.

"Well, that *is* funny, because I live in old Giles' house."

"You do! But the Markhams have lived there for centuries!"

"I bought the house from the younger Markham last year. He decided to go to Boston to make his fortune, and advertised the place for auction."

"Well, well, well . . . Excuse me, but you did give me quite a start. I'm Timothy Levy. It's my old uncle's name on the sign. Please forgive my rudeness, but you're the very image of Giles . . . Do you know anything about him?"

"Very little. Markham said that the house was built by a wealthy gentleman of the Federal era, named Giles de Retz. That's about it."

"Ha, there's much more to it than that! Giles was a wealthy merchant and shipbuilder, to be sure, but that wasn't the half of it. He was descended from a very old French line—a dramatic and ill fated one—and in the end he showed the blood . . ."

Joshua nodded, his writer's instincts sensing a tale. But he really wasn't in the mood to hear it at the moment.

"I have to go. I just stopped in to . . . warm up a minute. The breeze is cool this morning. But I'd like to come back and hear more about Giles some time. Do I really resemble him so much?"

"Strongly . . . And living in his house, too . . . Yes, why don't you stop back tomorrow afternoon? His is quite a story."

"Love to," said Joshua, and went once more into the brisk New England day.

When he stepped outside, the wind had freshened, and patchwork clouds were sliding across the sun. It was suddenly very chilly. He walked down to the waterfront. A sleek white yacht was taking on fuel. On the dock stood a pretty, dark-haired girl holding a big gray cat, muffled in her raincoat. He liked her eyes, a curious tilt to her nose, and made a mental note to use her in a story one day.

Suddenly he felt depressed, let down. He knew that it was mainly anxiety about Christine, tripping around the edges of his consciousness. Time to go home.

THE VAST HOUSE WAS EMPTY. JOSHUA LAID THE EVENING fire in the massive fireplace, stood for a moment tracing the smooth patterns in the white-painted wood. Yes, this house is mine, really and truly mine. I have everything a man could want . . .

He should get to work. Harcourt was calling for his next blockbuster, and his agent's calls were becoming a daily affair. But there would be time. He thought again of the old bookseller, the notion that he, Joshua, resembled Giles de Retz. A curious notion.

There was one room of the house that served as library and gunroom. It also housed a few memorabilia of de Retz. On impulse, Joshua decided to pay it a visit.

He walked down the hall and stopped in the doorway to flip a switch. The modernized chandelier flashed on, and he adjusted the rheostat to a moderate flow.

The furniture in the library was sturdy and masculine, featuring a mahogany Chippendale desk and several Gothic backed chairs. Many of the books were eighteenth century French works, with gilt edges and half-calf bindings.

He idly perused the volumes. They were all pre-Revolution. He pulled down an early edition of Pascal. It opened to one of the old philosopher's more well-known quotes, which Joshua translated with some difficulty:

Neither angel nor beast is man; the misfortune lies

in that he who would act the angel acts the beast.

He put the volume back. Not really an afternoon for philosophy, anyway. He glanced around the room and noticed the tall glass case of old weapons between two rows of shelves.

Giles had had eclectic tastes. Though Joshua knew little of medieval weaponry, he recognized the short pike, broadsword, smaller swords and mace. The mace was an intimidating object, a spiked iron ball with a thick oak handle. He opened the case and took it down, feeling the weight of it. It had that oddly balanced feel that all well-made weapons have. He took a few swings at an invisible adversary, and the ball jerked his arm. Grinning at himself, he replaced the mace on its hanger.

Time to hit the manuscripts. He descended to the kitchen to make a sandwich and get a beer to tide him over the next chapter of *Fortune's Ape*. And paused at the kitchen door.

Voices. Christine and Malden. Joshua felt an absurd desire to walk away, an equally absurd desire to storm in and make a scene. Instead he walked calmly in and headed for the refrigerator.

Christine looked up, her warm brown eyes twinkling.

"Josh! I found your note. Fancy meeting you here! Derek and I decided to take advantage of the solitude to practice our lines."

And what else were you practicing, thought Joshua. He modified his reply to "Well, you kids feel free."

Malden, toothy smile on display, stood and extended his hand. Joshua touched it briefly, noting that it was warm and dry, as a hero's hand is supposed to be.

"Good to see you again. Thought I saw you earlier today, as a matter of fact, down by the waterfront."

"You did. I was out for some air."

"Tried to catch up with you, but you darted away like something was after you. How's the novel?"

"Fine, just fine." He fetched his beer and made an exit from the kitchen, thinking of how cute Christine was, with that slight contact-lens wearing squint, one eye just the tiniest fraction higher than the other, giving her a humorously quizzical look. Of how cute *he* must find her.

Is there any reason for my fears? Joshua wondered, as he climbed the stairs. *Would I want to know if there was?* He mentally changed the subject but, somewhere inside, the topic raged on.

THE FOLLOWING DAY WAS MORE TYPICALLY NEW England Autumn. A squall blew in from the Atlantic; driving rain pelted the house. Joshua spent the morning at his typewriter.

Afternoon. Christine was off at the Junior College in Norwich. Joshua was restless, and had a glass of old brandy to help his thinking.

From years of self-analysis—the writer's bane and blessing—he decided that his problem was sexual. Christine had been staying up late, studying her parts. Once in bed, she'd fallen quickly asleep, ignoring his somewhat clumsy attempts to draw her attention.

Yes, that must be it. I'm too demanding.

Or am I? The restlessness grew. He put on his overcoat and slipped out into the chily afternoon.

The wind had fallen, the rain abated to a fine mist. He walked through the little town to find the old bookstore.

TIMOTHY LEVY WAS SEATED AT THE MAHOGANY DESK IN much the same posture as when Joshua had first seen him. When he saw his visitor, he stood with a wide smile. The man was tall for a bookseller, and strongly built, even in age. The air of meekness imparted by the thick bifocals was slightly deceptive.

"Welcome, welcome!" cried Levy, extending a thick hand. "I was hoping you'd drop by. You'd like to hear more about Master Giles, I take it?"

"Yes," said Joshua. "You hinted that he was some thing of a character?"

"Indeed, indeed. But to truly understand Giles, you need to know something about an ancestor of his, the Baron Gilles de Rais."

"Gilles de Rais . . . So *that's* why Giles' name sounds familiar! Wasn't he sort of the historical Bluebeard?"

"Less, and more. He was a powerful fifteenth century baron, a handsome, dynamic man with at least one fatal flaw."

"Which was?"

"He couldn't accept the fact that he wasn't a god. From a youth spent at the Court of Charles VIII he became a Marechal of France at the age of 25, a truly meteoric rise. He was Joan of Arc's personal bodyguard, and the commanding general of her army.

"After Jeanne d'Arc was disgraced, he retired to his chateau at Tiffauges and gradually became involved in Black Magic. He'd squandered his fortune, and tried to learn the secrets of alchemy to restore his lost wealth. From this, with the aid of various sorcerers and charlatans, including a diabolical Florentine named Prelati, he descended deeper and deeper into weird rites and sexual depravity."

"What kind of depravity?"

"He's said to have killed and mutilated several hundred adolescent children."

"Pretty disgusting. What finally happened to him?"

"Jean de Malestroit, Bishop of Nantes, finally brought him in. He confessed to hideous, unbelievable crimes, and was burned at the stake."

"Sounds like quite a bastard. What has he to do with Giles?"

"Giles was his direct lineal descendant."

"Wow!"

"It's little known, but de Rais had an illegitimate Countess, Elzebet Bathory. Gilles' line fled France to England in the sixteenth century, changing their name to Retz, and returned to France around 1680 when they thought it to be safe. Giles was a great great grandson of the infamous Baron."

Joshua pondered for a moment, reflecting on the panorama of blood and history that went with the Rais/Retz name.

"How do you come to know so much about Giles?" he asked finally.

"Oh, I was always fascinated by the Bluebeard legend," said Levy evasively. "I began to research it, and found the real-life antecedents more fabulous than the legend."

"So how did Giles come to leave France?"

"By the time of the Revolution, the Retz descendants had once again accumulated considerable wealth. It was only natural that they should become a target for the mob. Giles saw which way the wind was blowing and fled France with his young wife in 1788. He barely made it out in time."

"And wound up here in New England," mused Joshua. "What a curious tale . . . But you said that Giles showed the blood in the end . . ."

Levy frowned, nodded. "He did indeed, although, perhaps, he had cause. His wife was very young, and very lovely. One Autumn evening Giles came home unexpectedly to find her in the arms of a local merchant. He killed them both with a mace."

Joshua felt a chill, perhaps a bit more of a chill than the story itself warranted.

"Was he arrested?"

Levy nodded. "It was a kind of vengeance our ancestors understood—at least, the killing of his rival. But his wife had been much beloved of her neighbors, and what Giles did to the bodies . . ." Levy frowned, and Joshua did not press him for details.

"Well!" he said, standing, "that was indeed quite a tale. And you say that I resemble old Giles?"

Levy nodded emphatically.

"Well, I'll do my best not to live up to his legend—or that of his

curious ancestor!"'

JOSHUA RETURNED HOME TO AN EMPTY HOUSE. THERE was a rich beef stew set thoughtfully to simmer on the range, and a note taped to the top of the pot:

My friend Gretchen has invited me to spend the night studying with her—I've simply *got* to do well with my choreography class. See you tomorrow evening.

XXXXXXXXX
Christine

He absently dished out the stew. And thought clearly. There was no doubt, absolutely no doubt in his mind, that Christine was spending the night with Malden. He ate the stew and brooded. And began to feel just a little unhinged.

His thoughts ranged to old Giles. Old Giles' wife had been running around on him, too. It seemed to go with the house. Giles had found his solution . . .

This is nuts, he thought. He found the brandy and poured himself a stiff shot. It tasted good, and he had another, staring at the drawn curtains over the wide parlor window. Fine house. Fine life. He went to the closet, found his London Fog, and roamed out into the night.

The rain had stopped, the wind died down, and the streets of the old New England town were quiet and deserted. The pavement shined dully with reflections from the overarching streetlights, little pools of clarity, of modernity, in a place that for all practical purposes could have been the New Johnsport of a hundred years ago.

Malden's house was not far. The actor rented one of the smaller places at the northern edge of the neighborhood, a relatively plain house by New Johnsport standards, with a touch of gables and gingerbread that placed it in the early Victorian era.

He walked along the street. No dogs barked. They never did, in orderly New England villages. Joshua felt more a stranger than he'd ever felt, walking the night under a cloud of jealousy in this quiet, decorous town. He wondered if old Giles had walked thusly, suspicious of *his* young wife, yet hoping not to make the discovery . . .

There was one light, near the back of Malden's house. Joshua walked up the side street, opened a small gate in the white-painted fence that ringed the yard, and softly approached the shrubbery screening the window.

The shade was drawn, but there was just the tiniest slip of light at the bottom of the sash. He bent and peered inside.

And saw the sight that all loving, dumb husbands think they'll never see.

Malden had a fit, muscular body, he had to give him that. And Christine seemed to be very much appreciating it. The scene reminded him, perversely, of their honeymoon. So many, many years ago.

A thousand scenes of violence flamed through Joshua's mind. But, somehow, this truth was just too overwhelming for action. He turned quickly and slipped back into the night.

HE PACED THE LIBRARY, PACED AND PACED. FROM TIME to time his eyes lit on one or another of the finely bound volumes that lined the shelves, or on one or another of the weapons.

Finally he stopped pacing and took the mace from its case. He stood in the center of the room, let his arm gently fall back, then drew it smoothly forward in a motion that caused the spiked ball to snap like a shot at the end of its chain. He stood in the center of the room, slowly pivoting on his heels, whirling the mace at invisible opponents, and the knowledge came gradually into his mind: *I know how to use this thing. I know precisely how to use this thing.*

But this is mad. He returned the mace to its case and went to the parlor, where he poured himself a stiff drink. And thought of Christine. As he had seen her with Malden. And had another drink. And fell into a sudden, intense slumber.

He dreamed of Giles' ancestor. The dream was like a panorama of the tales that the old bookseller had told him, and, at least for the first part of the dreaming, he watched them with a detached dream consciousness, as one would watch an inner movie.

He witnessed the meteoric rise and fall of Gilles de Rais, the glory of his captaincy in Jeanne d'Arc's army, his gradual decline into degradation and degeneracy. He witnessed the abominations that he and the Countess Bathory—a ripe beauty with flaming red hair—performed with helpless innocents in the Chateau at Tiffauges. He smelled the musky wax of the tapers, the oil of the censers, the hot flush of blood and stench of scorched flesh.

And shared in the wild, damned, doomed lovemaking of de Rais and the Countess after their nights of unholy debauch, their carnality steeped in blood, in full awareness of their mutual damnation.

And approved. In his dreams, Joshua approved.

The images gradually changed, became more disordered. They were of Giles, the descendant. There came the threats to his family, the

murder of kinsmen by the Tribunal. The flight to England and the secret return to France.

And yes, there was the ship that finally bore Giles to the New World.

And he, Joshua/Giles, was standing on the bow of this ship, the salt spray in his face, watching the gray sea stream by, hearing the snap as a following wind filled the sails, the first ecstatic cry of the helmsman as land came into view.

Vignettes of life in New England. And of Giles, who knew something of his heritage, who had deep drives, deep doubts—who had certain dark instruments that only he knew of, and that the elders of the village called on him to use to extract testimony from those suspected of various crimes.

And of his wife, a beautiful, slender, blonde creature with one eye set the slightest bit above the other, just like Christine. Joshua was Giles, filled with a consuming love for this woman, seeing her seduced away from him by a young fop of the town.

And stepping one night into the darkened parlor, the mace, the mace that Gilles de Rais had wielded in battle, in his fist. Moving like a cat up the shadowy stairs to the bedroom. Listening at the door, to those so very intimate sounds.

The smashing of the door. Her scream. Those two pale faces. The whistling flight of the mace, and the implosive crunching impact, again, and again, and again . . .

Giles/Joshua, jerked awake, but not in horror. He thought of Christine's return, the next evening. And smiled. And fell into a deep, dreamless sleep.

HE AWOKE, MILDLY HUNG OVER, HIS DREAMS STILL VIVID in his mind. He had the slight impression that he was going mad. He made a large breakfast with much coffee, which helped some. When he looked out the window, he saw bits of sunlight. A high wind was carrying tangled cumulus in a westerly direction.

Writing was out of the question. Joshua needed someone to talk to, badly. But who?

And then he thought of the old bookseller. He threw on his raincoat and walked through the ambiguous day down to the waterfront.

When he emerged from the alley that, by habit, he'd begun to take as his route, he was surprised to see a local police car, engine idling, sitting by the curb. He was even more surprised to see an officer escort the bookseller from his shop to the car, and push him, rather roughly, into the rear seat.

As the other officer returned to lock up the shop, Joshua stepped

from the alley.

"Pardon me, officer," he said, "but I've had some dealings with this man. Is he in some kind of trouble?"

The cop looked Joshua up and down. He was a slender man of medium height, with short curly black hair and a black moustache. When he spoke, Boston was written all over his speech.

"I'd not be tellin' too many people I was a friend of his," the cop nodded back over his shoulder. "Police in New York been lookin' for that guy for a long time. He's the ringleader of an illegal sex operation. We caught up with him from his long distance phone bill. Had places in New York, Bridgeport, Newark. Made a bundle. Coordinate it all from his bookstore here in New Johnsport."

"My God!" said Joshua. "He seemed a decent enough fellow."

"It's them that fools you," said the cop. "And Levy ain't his real name neither. It's Prelatos. Carlo Prelatos."

The officer turned back to his car. Joshua stood watching as it pulled slowly away from the curb, Levy/Prelatos slumped down in the rear seat. Then, for an instant, he saw the man's face pressed to the window. And it was weird. It almost seemed as if he winked.

Musing on the nature of appearances, Joshua slowly walked back to his house.

HE SAT ON THE COUCH IN THE PARLOR, WATCHING THE afternoon slowly fade from the wide picture window. So Levy had been a criminal! Right here in sleepy New Johnsport! Too bad. He'd seemed to know his history. And Prelatos . . . Not far from Prelati—the sorcerer who'd led Giles de Rais into the Black Magic trip.

Prelati. Gilles. Christine . . .

He once more felt the mood of his dreams of the previous night coming over him. Such dreams! A fine novel they would make. And that last scene, where Giles murdered his unfaithful wife. What a scene for a movie!

He brought out another bottle, and thought of Christine. Of how he'd loved her. Of how he'd loved her, and was very aware of the past tense. She was a slut, a bitch, just like all the rest of them. Just like Giles' wife, and thousands, hundreds of thousands of others who had no real feelings. No real feelings at all . . .

Thinking, drinking, he walked into the library. Went to the weapons case. And took down the mace.

He swung it once. It snapped perfectly at the end of the chair, just as it had snapped on the heads of Jeanne d'Arc's enemies, so many many years ago. Just as it had crushed the head of the unfaithful bitch that

Giles had been married to.

He carried it back to the couch, and waited for Christine.

THE WINDOW HAD DARKENED INTO EVENING WHEN HE heard the car pull up outside. Joshua gulped the last of the second bottle of brandy and idly moved the spiked ball on its chain, softly rolling it across the carpet.

He heard her shoes click on the steps. A muted sound of voices. She tried the door, found it locked, inserted her key.

The door swung open. She stepped inside, face flushed, her long blonde hair tousled around her elegant cheekbones, her humorous eyes searching the darkness. She'd begun to walk across the shadowy room before she saw Joshua sitting on the couch. And she did not know that it wasn't quite the man she knew.

"My God! How you startled me! Gretchen and I had a really good session last night. I learned a lot from her, she's such a serious student."

"I'm sure you did," said Giles thickly, rising from the couch.

Christine smiled quizzically, then saw the mace trailing from Giles' hand.

"Goodness dear! Are you playing with the old stuff from the library? Are you just a little bit drunk, perhaps?"

Giles smiled, and began to swing the mace in short arcs, momentum arcs, as he slowly approached Christine.

She caught on very quickly, as the guilty often do. And she screamed as Giles' arm trailed back behind him.

The door crashed open with a rending of bolts and latch. Giles half turned as Malden's thick shoulder rammed into his stomach. He cried out, swung the mace, but the younger man ducked under the swing and his sharp uppercut put Giles into realms of darkness.

Where he dreamed of himself and the green-eyed countess, riding through the countryside under a full hunter's moon, looking for the child that would be the victim of this night's rites . . .

CHRISTINE AND DEREK WALKED TOWARD THE OLD OR-chard Beach wharf. Around them milled a multi-colored crowd of visitors from all New England and maritime Canada. The smell of hot dogs and fried clams was in the air, the sound of "jetsy" Canadian French and the music of the carnival rides. Christine laughed and hugged Derek. When Joshua had been declared hopelessly insane, they'd waited a few discreet months. Then she'd sold the house in New Johnsport—a stuffy town, anyway, she thought—and moved to

Boston, where Derek had a promising career on the stage.

They bought a basket of fried clams and two cokes and walked down to the waterfront. There they stretched out on the long pier in the sun, munching and gazing out at the gray sea, riffled with whitecaps.

"I'm so happy," she said, stroking his arm, "and to think, you're not only my love, but you saved my life!" She shivered. "Boy, that was a close one! How did you know to come in? Why did you wait around? God, it was *so close!*"

Derek laughed. "I worry about you. You know I thought I heard someone outside the window the night before. And my family's always had a kind of sixth sense. Gives us advance warning in times of danger, that sort of thing."

She ruffled his thick dark hair. "Really, you're too much. What *is* your family background, anyway? And why is it so mystical?"

"Oh, I come from a very old French line," he said, kissing her lightly on the lips, "The Malden name came when my family immigrated, because the Ellis Island idiots couldn't spell their real name."

"Which was?"

"De Malestroit. Very old nobility. They were into lots of things before the Empire. Did you ever hear of Gilles de Rais? He was a weird Baron who murdered all kinds of people, and started the Bluebeard legend. Well, it was one of my ancestors who finally caught him."

"Far out," said Christine, laughing. "Far out." She bent to kiss him again. "You and your silly tales." ◉

"I cannot agree with those who rank modesty among the virtues. To the logician all things should be seen exactly as they are, and to underestimate one's self is as much a departure from truth as to exaggerate one's own powers."

—Sherlock Holmes
THE GREEK INTERPRETER

There was thirty million dollars in treasure—just waiting for them!

The Trove

by MICHAEL T. SHOEMAKER

"EVER HEAR OF THE BEALE TREASURE?" BRIAN SIMS ASKED abruptly, after the others had gone.

Mark Hensley finished counting his winnings. "No, I don't think so," he answered with little interest as he pocketed the money and put on his jacket.

"Sit down a minute and I'll tell you about it."

Mark gave a short laugh. "Another scheme of yours?" He sat down. "Isn't pirate treasure a bit out of your line?"

"It's not pirate treasure. It was supposed to be gold and silver mined out west by a band of Virginia adventurers led by Thomas Jefferson Beale. They brought it back and hid it between 1819 and 1821, then returned to mine some more. But they disappeared."

"You don't believe that stuff, do you? Isn't it just a legend?"

"Nope, it's true all right—in part, at least. Beale buried it four miles from Buford's Tavern in the Blue Ridge of Bedford County. Then he entrusted a friend with three encoded messages describing the treasure's history, location, and heirs. Three different keys were used, and a letter revealing the keys was entrusted to another to be mailed after ten years, in case Beale or his friends should not return. But it never arrived. Since then, the message with the history was decoded using the Declaration of Independence, and a computer partially decoded the location a few years ago."

"And you want to look for it? You've got to be kidding."

Sims bony face was placid; no smile broke through the barrier of his black mustache and beard. "I've already found it," he said. "The location, that is."

"How did you do that?" Mark asked skeptically.

"With a lot of computer time and certain linguistic clues in the partially decoded message. I made assumptions, tested them, made more, and so on till I solved it."

"If all this is true, why do you need me?"

Sims knitted his brows and took a deep breath. "The treasure wasn't there."

"Well, if it was ever there, someone else probably got it long ago."

"It was there all right. I saw the excavated vault, just like the message described. But no one took it recently. I don't think they could keep it secret very long. The treasure's worth thirty million dollars!"

Mark began to feel excited. "So where is it?"

"The truth lies in an old theory about the treasure. You see, gems are part of the treasure. Beale claimed he got them in trade in St. Louis to reduce the transportation expense, but some people always thought that was suspicious. The fact is Beale and his friends were negotiating agents for the Cherokee resettlement, which began in 1817. The treasure was bribe money for the tribal chiefs, but Beale double-crossed them. When the chiefs found out, they killed Beale and his friends. Then they moved the treasure to their own secret hiding place deep in a nearby cavern."

"How do you know all this?"

"I found out—that's all."

"Okay, but I still don't see why you've told me all this."

"Because—I need your help," he said reluctantly and with a bit of embarrassment. "The treasure's large and heavy," he explained hastily, "and I want to get it out as fast as possible to prevent discovery." He paused. "I'll give you ten percent."

Mark guessed that there was another reason, which Sims didn't want to admit. Sims was probably afraid to make the search alone, for spelunking could be dangerous business. "Suppose I want more?" he asked.

"No, you'll take ten percent. After fifteen years, I know you." He smiled and tapped the card deck that lay on the table. "Besides, poker's the best insight into a man's character. That's why I picked you. You're careful—not greedy—you'll be glad to make an easy three million."

"I'll be glad to make three million," said a voice from the dark living room.

Sims leaped up, cursing, and Mark spun around to confront the short, shadowy figure. With a smirk on his face, Dennis Cullen stepped into the light of the dining room.

"I play poker, too," Cullen said. "I've thought for a long time you were planning something, so I slipped into the den when the others left."

Sims looked ill. He seemed too startled to be wrathful. "Damn you, Dennis," he said weakly. "Damn you."

Mark didn't mind another partner. There would be safety in numbers, for Sims was too greedy to be entirely trustworthy, no matter how good a friend he had been. "He could be a help," Mark suggested, hoping to placate Sims. "We'll bring it out faster."

The tension went out of Sims's body, and he slowly lowered himself back into the chair. He appeared resigned to the situation. "All right," he sighed, "ten percent." Then like a flaring ember, "But if you try to hold me up for more . . ." He left the sentence unfinished.

THE PICKUP SLOWLY ASCENDED THE LONELY MOUNTAIN road, weaving around ruts and rocks and passing through waves of dense fog. As it climbed higher, the fog thinned and the morning light brightened.

"I still think we should have come at night," Cullen complained, "The fog's already burning off."

"There's enough greenery out to give us cover," Sims said. "We'd never find the cave at night, and our lights would probably be seen."

A few more minutes passed in silence, and then Sims said, "Pull off to the left there, where the road widens for a moment." He glanced down at the topographic map spread out on his lap and looked up again. "Yeah, this is it."

They got out of the truck, and Sims spread the map on the hood for them to study. "See where the road crosses the stream," Sims said, pointing, "that's this stream up ahead." He pointed to the creek about fifty yards up the road. "Now we follow that all the way up till it dries up, about here, then we follow the side of this ridge a bit farther and we'll come to the entrance. If anyone stops us, we'll act polite and say we didn't see the 'No Trespassing' sign. We'll say our truck broke down and we're taking a short cut over the saddle instead of walking way around by the road." He folded up the map and put it in his breast pocket, which he buttoned. Then he raised the hood and bent over the engine.

"What are you doing?" Cullen asked.

"Taking out the rotor. Don't want anyone who comes along to steal

the truck."

"Or one of us? You think we'll slip away and run out on you after we've hauled out some of the treasure, don't you?"

Sims closed the hood and pocketed the rotor. "Not really," he said calmly.

"Dennis has a point," Mark said. "How do we know *you* won't run out on *us*? You've got the rotor."

"Because we're not going to load up the truck till we're ready to go. Someone might come poking around and take a look under the tarp and find it."

"Then where do we put it?"

Sims glanced toward the creek. "We'll put it in the culvert under the road. It'll be safe enough there, and when we've got it all, we'll transfer it to the truck. That way nobody will find it, and none of us can run out on the others."

"I don't know," Cullen said, staring with a frown toward the creek; "wouldn't it be better if one of us stayed here to guard it? You'd still have the rotor."

"No, that would slow us down. With all three of us working, it'll still take at least a dozen trips to haul out all the treasure."

Mark felt a resurgence of skepticism. He had been caught up in the tale, like a dreamer in his reverie, excited by the adventure and the romance of the idea; but now that he was here, ready to embark on the enterprise, it all seemed too absurd. "What makes you so sure it's still there?"

Sims smiled and shrugged. "I'm not." He became serious again. "But it's worth finding out, isn't it? Come on, let's get started."

THEY TOOK THREE KNAPSACKS FROM THE BACK OF THE truck and began their search. Following the stream was easy for the first quarter-mile, for hemlocks grew thickly along the banks, and little else but running ground pine could live within the hemlocks' shadows. Farther up, as the stream neared the mountain saddle, the ravine broadened into a barely damp bog, a collecting bowl for the waters of the three surrounding slopes. The hemlock gave way to oak and hickory, and the sparse undergrowth became a tangle of locust shoots and nettles.

Sims called a halt, studied his map, and announced, "That's the ridge, all right." He pointed to a modest rise of rock, barely visible through the treetops on their right. "Look out for snakes," he reminded them, as he picked up a stick and began to hack his way through the dense brush.

Mark and Cullen hardly had time to grumble before reaching the shale slope, where nothing but scrub-pine grew. Sensing that their goal was near, the men began to eagerly scramble up the slope along the base of the ridge. Bits of the brittle shale broke away beneath their feet, forming tiny avalanches that slid down behind them with a swishing, crackling sound.

"We've climbed . . . a hundred feet . . . haven't we?" Sims asked between gasps.

"I guess," Mark answered breathlessly.

"Well, it should be here . . . somewhere . . . the cave is . . . a hundred feet up."

They separated and began to search for the opening. In a few minutes, Cullen called excitedly from an outcrop above, "I've found it! I've found it!" Then he fell silent, sat down on a rock, and examined something in his hands, while Mark and Sims clambered up to him.

Cullen held out a human skull when they reached him. "Looks like we're not the first." He leered. "But I don't suppose it matters."

Sims seemed stunned. He frowned and hesitated momentarily before taking hold of the skull. Then he inspected it nervously. "Where did you find it?"

"Right here." Cullen stood up and stepped aside, revealing a narrow crevice behind the rock.

Mark peered into the gloom and saw bones just inside the entrance. He reached in and pushed away a large rock that partially blocked the passage. "Looks like he grabbed for a hold, and a piece of shale broke and fell on him." He turned around and saw that Sims was still contemplating the skull. "What do you know about this, Brian?"

Sims looked up. "His name's Rudolf—I suppose." He set the skull down respectfully. "He was a folklorist studying the Cherokees in the 1890s, and he learned about the treasure. After locating the cave, he left a record for his family, but they never took him seriously. Then he disappeared when he went to get the treasure, and that just reinforced the family's hostility to the whole idea. I found his notes during my research."

"Why didn't you tell us this before?" Mark asked. "You're still keeping something from us."

"No, I'm not; it's just that I thought you wouldn't believe me because it was folklore."

Mark was not convinced. He could understand the Indians' use of the cave as a temporary warehouse, so they could cart off their treasure a little bit at a time, but he wondered why Sims expected to find the treasure intact.

"Come on, we're wasting time," Cullen interrupted.

"He's right," Sims said with new animation. "Let's get started."

THEY PUT ON SPELUNKING HELMETS, WHICH THEY HAD
carried in their packs, and secured a rope with pitons. Then, after examining the crevice with his light, Sims descended feet first into the cave. Cullen and Mark followed.

As he descended the steep slide, Mark watched the narrow ribbon of sunlight dwindle. He imagined himself caught in the jaws of a stony monster. Flakes of shale sprinkled down on his head. At any moment, it seemed, the roof would fall, the jaws would close. His muscles tensed, as if to physically resist the overwhelming claustrophobia. Then he felt the clasp of a hand on his leg.

"Just a three-foot drop," Sims said as he helped Mark down to the floor of a small chamber.

"Look here!" Cullen yelled. His light shined on a decayed sack filled with glinting golden ingots. "We've found it! We're rich!"

Sims caught his arm and restrained him. "That's not it. That's just what Rudolf was carrying out. It must have tumbled down here in the accident."

"Okay, but we know it's true, it's here," Cullen chattered excitedly.

"Relax, it's not going anywhere. But we've got to be careful. We're in the limestone core now. There're probably passages and drops all over the place."

As if to illustrate his point, Sims turned his head left and right, and his light flashed past a jagged landscape of stalagmites and stalactites. Among the dark holes and twisted shadows, the shape of an Indian leaped by. Sims jerked his head back and shined his light on the image, which was drawn on the cavern wall.

The Indian stood beside a passage, and his upraised arm held a shield above the entrance. The design cleverly incorporated an actual "shield" stalactite, which gave the image a three-dimensional vividness. Three lines forming an arrow had been incised on the shield.

"It must be in there," Cullen said, running ahead to look into the dark passage. He stopped at the entrance. "It goes down—deeper," he said in dismay.

Mark's attention was still focused on the Indian. "I'll bet it's a curse to scare off robbers," he said as he walked over to inspect it. Then he saw Sims hanging back. "You know about this, don't you? Tell us."

Sims came forward. "You're right. It is a curse." He seemed relieved to tell them. "The shield bars entry, and the arrow means the threat of death."

"What's the matter?" said Cullen. "Are you superstitious? We've got work to do." He opened his pack and took out more rope and pitons.

"Wait a minute," Mark said. "He still knows something." He grabbed Sims by the shirt. "I'm sick of you holding out on us. Tell us everything. Are there traps in there? Are you using us to clear the way?"

"No!" Sims shouted, pushing Mark away. "I don't know what's ahead." He turned to Cullen. "And I'm not superstitious. I was just—surprised." He became calmer. "I didn't know whether *you* were superstitious. The legend says that the tribal council killed the corrupt clan chiefs as well as Beale and his friends. And then they brought the treasure here, to bury their shame, and laid a curse against all who would be tempted by it."

Cullen laughed. "Well, I'm tempted, curse or no curse. Now let's get on with it."

"I'll lead," Sims offered, "if you're afraid of traps."

"That sounds like a good idea," Mark answered.

THEY CLIMBED DOWN THE ROPE ONE AT A TIME. THE walls grew damper the deeper they descended, and at the bottom they found themselves standing in a foot of water. A shimmering pond lay before them, and beyond it, a small hole in the wall appeared to be the only other opening in the chamber.

"Hang onto the rope," Sims said. "No telling what's under this water." He gripped the rope and slowly uncoiled the unused portion while advancing with the greatest care. At each step, he tested his footing before bringing his full weight forward.

Upon safely reaching the other side, they examined the hole. It was a smooth tube, less than a yard in diameter, which descended at a slight angle into impenetrable darkness.

"It's a damn rat hole," Mark said, feeling a renewal of his claustrophobia. He surveyed the room again, hoping that they had missed the correct route, but saw no other opening except the portal through which they had already passed.

Sims snapped off the end of a stalactite and bounced the stone down the tube. The rapid series of sharp clicks became more resonant as the stone vanished in the darkness. "Sounds like it leads to another room without any drop," Sims said, seeking reassurance.

"Yeah, go on," Cullen urged impatiently.

After repeating the test, Sims tied the end of the rope around his waist and started down the hole. He kept hold of the rope and lowered

himself slowly. Upon reaching the bottom, he called back to them, "It's a room! Careful coming down, it's slippery."

When Mark's turn came, he braced himself for the ordeal and then descended as quickly as he could. The slimy walls made it seem as if he were sliding down the gullet of a giant giraffe.

"Where the devil is it?" Cullen exclaimed in frustration as Mark emerged from the passage.

No one answered. Instead, they scanned the room grimly. A broad labyrinth with a low ceiling confronted them. Water dripped from nearly every stalactite, and streaked down the walls like sweat, gathering in dozens of little pools.

"I'm sure it's not much farther," Sims said in an apparent effort to bolster their confidence. "Let's try the largest tunnel first."

The others agreed, and Sims unpacked their last rope and attached it to the end of the previous rope. Then, crouching, the men entered the passage in single file. The corridor ascended slightly and forked several times. After wasting almost an hour exploring dead end branches, they saw, at the dim limit of their lights, an apparition. An indistinct, white figure sat motionless before them.

Sims stopped suddenly and gasped, "What is it?"

Damp, cold, and tired, Mark was momentarily too startled to speak. Then rationality reasserted itself. "It's just another carving." Pushing past Sims and Cullen, he took the lead. "Come on."

Drawing closer, Mark saw the figure grow more grotesque even as it became less fearsome, for it was neither an apparition nor a carving. The figure was a corpse, only half decayed, seated on a ledge with its back against the wall. Half the skull jutted out from a stalactite in which it was embedded. The preserved chest and arms showed palely through the thin, translucent encrustation of rock. But the hands had dropped off, and now lay as two small piles of bones. The legs had also decayed, but the bones remained in place, frozen in the rock. No scrap of clothes was evident, indicating that the man had been stripped before he was killed.

"That must be Beale, or the others," Sims said, with rising excitement.

"Then we must be close," Cullen said anxiously.

THE PASSAGE TURNED LEFT AND OPENED ONTO A SMALL chamber, but Mark stopped before the figure and stared, riveted by the ghastly sight. He saw a statue of death, fashioned from man and stone by nature; a burial in rock in a cavernous crypt. He knew that stalactites formed much faster than most people realized, and that

enough time had passed for the body to become encased, but the explanation failed to dispel his feelings of portent. Raising his eyes to the ceiling, he imagined the mountain above and could almost feel its weight pressing down.

Sims and Cullen shoved Mark aside and, shouting wildly, rushed into the chamber on the left. Their lights swept the room, revealing skeletons in contorted postures of death, and settled on six iron pots filled with the treasure they sought. Like men at an oasis, they ran forward and plunged their hands into the riches. They caressed and admired the sparkling jewels and the ingots of gold and silver, while hysterically proclaiming their happiness. Mark, infected by their excitement, threw off his melancholy and joined them in their frenzied joy.

"There're enough gems to fill one pack," Sims said after they had all grown calmer. "We'll start with them and two packs of gold, then take the rest of the gold, and the silver last."

"Let's divide the load of gems," Cullen said.

"Why bother? It's a waste of time. None of us can get away from the others."

"That's not the point. The gems are lighter. It wouldn't be fair."

"All right, but we'd better pack the gold first. We don't want to damage the gems."

They half-filled their packs with gold and then hefted them.

"It's too much," Mark declared. "It must be a hundred pounds already."

"The gems won't add much more," said Cullen.

"Dennis is right," Sims said. "We've got to make every trip count. If we have to, all three of us can haul up each pack when we come to the cliff."

Sims and Cullen began scooping out handfuls of gems and placing them in each of the packs in rotation. But Mark stood by passively, staring straight ahead, for he had noticed something peculiar. More water than before seemed to be oozing out of the walls. Mark glanced left and right, and then turned around and swept his light across the cave floor.

"Don't just stand there," Sims said, "give us a hand."

"We've got to get out of here," Mark said anxiously.

"What do you mean?"

"Look at the walls and floor. It must be raining outside." His agitation increased. "The cave is flooding, and we could be trapped!"

"We can spare a minute. We're almost done," Cullen responded angrily, while doubling his efforts.

"Help us!" Sims demanded.

"We don't know how long . . .," Mark began as he ran to the exit and turned the corner. He continued a few steps down the passage and found himself wading into increasingly deeper water. Returning to the chamber in panic, he shouted, "Come on! Now! It's already deep."

"All right! We're done anyway," Sims said as he and Cullen packed a few more handfuls. Then they laboriously lifted their packs to a ledge, slipped their arms under the straps, and staggered forward under the weight. "Get your pack," he ordered.

"Leave it," Mark pleaded. "You can't get through with all that. We'll come back."

"Suppose the cave gets blocked, or stays flooded," said Cullen. "This may be our only chance."

"No!"

Cullen pulled out a gun.

"Where did you get that?"

"I hid it on the truck and retrieved it just before we started hiking." He grinned at Sims. "You should have searched for weapons before the hike, instead of doing it before the drive down here."

"He'll kill us both," Mark said to Sims, trying to frighten him into action as a decoy.

"No, I won't. I don't want to kill anyone. All I want is the big share. Now get your pack, and let's go. Brian first, and then you."

THEY FILED OUT OF THE CHAMBER AND INTO THE MAZE of passages. The cold water gradually deepened as they made the long descent to the lowest room in the cave. By the time the level reached their knees, they had to fight to lift each foot.

"It's not good, Dennis!" Mark called out. "We'll never make it. The packs are slowing us down."

"Grab the guide rope," Cullen ordered, "and use it to help pull yourself along. We're not quitting now!"

They trudged onward, too breathless to argue. Higher and higher the water rose, while a steady rain fell from the cracks in the ceiling, creating a maddening cacophony throughout the cavern.

Mark felt himself slipping into the stupor of great fatigue and wondered if they were lost. It seemed as though they had already walked an enormous distance without making any progress at all, for the cave was beginning to look the same everywhere. They might just as well be pulling something toward them, he imagined, as pulling themselves toward something.

Suddenly the rope went limp, and Mark fell backwards, pulled

beneath the water by the weight of his pack. He slipped out of the harness and sprang up to the surface. Gasping as he emerged from the water, he found himself in total darkness. His light had gone out. But an instant later, he noticed a dull glow beneath the water a few yards ahead.

Sims, minus his pack, burst into view. He leaned against the wall and coughed up some water. Still gripping the rope, he said between gasps, "I held on. We can still follow it out, if it hasn't drifted too far."

Mark turned around to check on Cullen, but saw nothing within the bounds of Sims's light and only blackness beyond. "Dennis!" he called. Several seconds passed. "He's gone," he said in a shocked tone.

"Good riddance," said Sims, still coughing, as he turned to push onward.

Mark hesitated and then followed him. He had great difficulty making any headway, however, for the waterline had reached his lower ribs. He dove forward and attempted to swim, but he kept hitting the walls of the dark, twisting tunnel. Ahead of him, he saw Sims plunging powerfully onward, pulling farther and farther away.

"Don't leave me!" Mark pleaded several times. But Sims never paused, nor spoke, and he soon disappeared around a bend in the passage, leaving Mark in total darkness.

Mark stopped, took a deep breath, and crouched down to grope for the rope beneath the water. He found it at once and surfaced. Then he began tracing its route, while trying to avoid pulling the rope toward him. Like a blind man in a maze, he banged into the walls at every curve. But there was no time for caution, and so he lurched forward frantically.

Then Mark slammed his head into the ceiling. Reaching out, he found what he had feared. The ceiling slanted down to the waterline ahead. For a moment he considered turning back, but as cold as he was, without food or fire, and with dwindling air, he would surely die before the flood receded, even if the cave were not filled. Such a slim, passive hope was not for him, he thought as he dove into the flooded passage.

He rolled to face the ceiling. Then, by gripping the stalactites, he swiftly pulled himself forward as if he were climbing a horizontal ladder. His eighth hand-hold was a human face.

Mark expelled nearly all his air in shock. In a frenzy, he clawed his way past the corpse, which seemed to cling to him, holding him back. Then the ceiling vanished, and he shot upward, leaving the body behind. His bursting lungs gave out just as he reached the surface, and he gulped down water and air alike. Choking, he reached out blindly

for something to hold onto and found a ledge on his left. He crawled onto it and collapsed from exhaustion.

THE CORPSE HAD BEEN SIMS'S MARK REALIZED AS HE RESTED. The thought evoked no feelings; not the satisfaction of revenge, nor even the pleasure of knowing that he alone now possessed the secret of that treasure. He felt nothing but the will to survive. He wanted no treasure but life.

The water began creeping over the ledge, ending his brief rest. He had to find, somewhere across the room and under water, the tubular passage that was his only hope of escape.

In a few strokes, he swam across the room. Then he dove and started to search along the base of the wall. A powerful current pushed against him. By following the current to its source, he discovered the passage and the rope they had descended. He was relieved to find the second rope still secure. The third rope, which they had been following back, had apparently pulled apart from the second. He could not understand how the knot had come undone, but he had no time to wonder.

After coming up for air, Mark descended again and entered the passage. The walls of the tube were too smooth to offer any holds, so he clasped the rope with both hands, squeezed it between his feet, and began pulling himself up hand over hand. The current pushed him back with the force of a water cannon. The rope slipped through his hands, rubbing them raw, as he shot down the tube.

He surfaced and rested. He knew that each failure would weaken him, so he resolved to use all his strength on the next attempt.

Gambling on his lungs, Mark climbed the rope more slowly. He ascended in smaller increments and made certain that his grip never relaxed. Twice more the current drove him down, painfully chafing his palms, but he hung on each time and lost only a few feet.

The nature of the current suddenly changed. Instead of pushing him back from one narrow direction, it started to suck him down in a swirling motion. He realized then that he was out of the passage and had entered the room with the pond, which was now a deep lake. The force of the current rapidly diminished as he pulled himself up through the depths and across the lake. In a few more seconds, he simultaneously broke the water's surface and gently struck the opposite wall.

He rested briefly, buoyed by the water, and then began to climb the cliff. To his surprise, the ascent was but a few feet, for the lake had risen almost to the top. Crawling through the portal, he saw across the chamber the faintest shaft of light. He rose to his feet and stumbled toward it desperately, all the more anxious now that escape was so

near. As he crossed the room, his foot struck Rudolf's sack and scattered the gold, but he never noticed, so fixed was his desire.

The impulse for escape continued to drive him onward even after he emerged from the mountain. He scrambled, slid, and tumbled down the slope, and fell unconscious at the bottom.

MARK'S CLOTHES WERE STILL WET WHEN HE AWOKE TO A prodding. He looked up into the barrels of a shotgun, held by a rough-looking man in overalls.

"Who are you?" the man asked. "What're you doin' on my land?"

"We were just caving—up there," Mark said wearily. His muscles ached and his head throbbed painfully. "My friends drowned—when the rain flooded the cave."

"What rain? It hasn't rained in days."

Mark stared at him in confusion and wondered whether the man was joking. "It must have!" He pulled at his shirt. "Look, my clothes are wet. That proves it."

The man frowned and said nothing for a moment. Then, staring at Mark's hands, he said, "Say, you're bleeding, mister."

Mark turned his palms up and beheld the bleeding rope-burns. On each hand, three lines had converged on the web between the thumb and forefinger to form a perfect arrow. ●

MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAKERS

Marvin L. Shaw (*The Orphan of Coventry Road*):

I've been a practicing attorney for thirty-seven years. I'm married and since our four children have grown up, I've written some articles pertaining to my field as well as two mystery novels, one of which will hopefully be published soon. Quite naturally, they use a lawyer-amateur detective as the protagonist.

THE ORPHAN OF COVENTRY ROAD is my first short story to be published. Since I practice law full time and write on nights and weekends, it follows that my wife is very understanding.

Josh could not forget the terrible sight of the man standing over his dead parents with a smoking pistol. All these years he had waited for revenge—and now his time had come!

The Orphan of Coventry Road

by MARVIN L. SHAW

JOSHUA HAD BEEN A "FRUMMA YID"—A PIOUS JEW. HE had believed in the precepts of his faith and the ethics of the Fathers and he still said his prayers with regularity, chanting them in the morning, afternoon and evening like any devoted Jew. Question was, he wondered, was he still devoted? Since it had happened in 1974, he wasn't certain whether he was praying or just mouthing the words.

That day in May, ten years ago, came back to him now as he and Judith left his battered '72 Rambler on De Sota Avenue and walked

down Taylor Road to the little synagogue. They walked in silence up the steps and entered the little two-story red brick building. There they parted their ways. Judith went up the stairs to the second floor where the women prayed on their hard maple benches separated from the men, concealed from each other's sight by a latticed wooden partition. Joshua entered the sanctuary on the first floor. He righted his black skull cap which was slightly askew on his thick black hair and slid into one of the pews.

The prayers had not yet begun. They were waiting for the tenth man and he questioned the need for ten—and also—why must they be men? Why don't the women count in the synagogue? He shrugged his shoulders as he queried himself while the murmuring—the little pockets of conversation, here and there, broke the silence.

When he prayed in the morning, he always felt an eerie sense of the occult, particularly when he placed the phylacteries on his head, his arms and his hands. A shiver went through him now even without the religious trappings twined about on his body, for he'd counted again and reached ten—there were ten men—not nine, but the tenth man looked like Rabbi Levine and he was dead. As he looked, Rabbi Levine faded away, as if he'd been only a mist. Joshua shook his head, as if to clear his mind. Then he saw—it wasn't the dead Rabbi—it was Sammy Gross. Or had it been the Rabbi-reaching from God knows where—to rejoin his former *schul* members? All right, now we're ready, Josh whispered to himself as he banished the disturbing thoughts he'd just had. They recited the traditional afternoon and evening prayers, including the Kaddish, the memorial prayer for the dead that doesn't mourn the dead, but rather praises God—extolling his mercy and understanding. As he recited the Kaddish, that horrible day ten years ago flashed by him once again.

IT HAD BEEN A HAPPY, CONTENTED DAY FOR JOSHUA when he was through with school that Friday in January. He'd gone directly from school to the store to help his mother and father, the proprietors of Gold's Coventry Book Shop. He swept up the store, his daily chore, then went to the back to get a cold drink from the little refrigerator. He enjoyed it, threw away the empty can and had started up front when he heard his mother scream. Then came those terrible sounds—one—two—three—four. He ran, stopping when he saw a man with money in one hand and a gun in the other. Joshua would never forget him, this big man with his pale, almost paper-white complexion and bright red scar under one eye. He stood there gasping in short, quick breaths. Then he saw his parents lying between the stacks of their

beloved books, their blood running down the tongue-and-groove markings of the floor, changing its color from golden hue to deep muddy dark brown. He was unable to move as the man turned and ran from the store.

JOSHUA WAS STILL STANDING, EVEN THOUGH THE prayers were over, picturing his parents as he last saw them. The ambulance came, but too late. He was thirteen years old then and had been Bar Mitzvah just four weeks before it happened—but he could only remember that he didn't help them. Everyone else had left. He'd lost himself in the past once more as he did every year when that day came around again. Today it was different though. He'd thought of it often. Now, he proclaimed to the walls of the empty synagogue, "I'll free myself."

He walked out slowly, thinking of his mother and father. They'd lived in Cleveland Heights for almost as long as he could remember. Cleveland Heights—the All American City. He liked it there. People lived together, for the most part, in what was an unusually homogeneous community. But Joshua Gold, tall with his tanned aquiline face, dark brown deep-set eyes, drank from the cup of bitterness. The sweetest of wines turned to gall within him whenever he recalled his parents' last day, and he promised himself an eye for an eye.

He'd struggled these years, pulled one way by his determination to make the killer pay and the other by his deeply rooted faith. He was glad he had Judith, even if just for now. She was always with him, and at this time of year it mattered greatly for she knew his torment. As he left the building she walked up to him and held out her hand. He took it and they walked back to the car. As they did, he looked down at her and watched the glint of brightness as the sun caught her long auburn hair. He relaxed for a moment and smiled. Her hand pressed his tightly and the words rushed out.

"Don't let it consume you, Josh."

"I try. But I can't forget."

"But it makes you forget us."

"I can't help it, Judy."

"Will we ever get . . . ?" Then she closed her lips tightly and stopped just short of saying it.

"Please don't ask me, Judy."

He couldn't tell her why they couldn't plan, and he sighed as they got into the car. The heaviness that hung over him weighed him down, depressing her in turn.

"What are you thinking about?" she asked.

He shook his head. "That stupid jury. They didn't believe me when I identified him."

THE TRIAL HAD BEEN HELD IN THE CRIMINAL COURTS Building on East 24th Street between Payne and Superior Avenues in a neighborhood of factories, dilapidated homes, and dingy offices. The building with its dirty stone exterior and its unwashed windows that kept the sun out, had the look of a grey rectangular tombstone. On the second floor, bondsmen, their eyes on the courtroom doors stood ready to make a quick dollar, bonding some character who didn't want to look through the steel bars. Poor ventilation made the smoke from the tossed-away cigarettes and cigars that smoldered in the urns seem twice as heavy as it really was. Wraiths of people who'd been there before, the defendants, the families, the pimps and the whores seemed to walk through the screen of grey air that filled the airspace of the hallway. The disembodied ones seemed to crowd the real ones against the walls. People's tears that had fallen there over the years lent a dampness that caused the passersby to draw within themselves as if to avoid being touched by the sadness.

- Q. "What time of day was it?"
A. "About 3:30."
Q. "Were all of the lights on?"
A. "No."
Q. "Which lights were on?"
A. "The ones in the back, but there was light from the store window."
Q. "But wasn't the man's back to the window?"
A. "Yes."
Q. "Was there any artificial light on his face?"
A. "No."
Q. "How long did he stand there?"
A. "Long enough so I remember him."
Q. "Did he stand there for five minutes, or four? How long?"
A. "I don't know exactly."
Q. "Could it have been for just a minute?"
A. "I suppose."
Q. "Could it have been for just a few seconds."
A. "Yes."

As the trial concluded, Joshua heard the defense attorney ask the jury not to convict a man of murder on the testimony of a young boy who was in an unlighted room and who saw a man's face for only a few seconds. Particularly, a young boy who, very understandably, he said,

was emotionally distraught seeing his parents dead before him . . .

"Ladies and Gentlemen of the jury, have you reached a verdict?"

"We have, Your Honor."

"What is that verdict?"

"Not Guilty, Your Honor."

"So say you all?"

"So say we all."

Steve Barker walked out free. Much freer than Joshua.

JUDITH SETTLED BACK IN THE RAMBLER AND PUT HER seat belt on. She didn't know what else to say.

Josh turned the key in the ignition. The motor sputtered, hesitated, then finally turned over, and he pulled away. Up to Taylor, down to Superior Road and up Hampshire to Judith's house and into her driveway without a word.

They sat there in continued silence, neither moving to leave the car. Judith turned to look at Joshua. She knew she couldn't let it go on like this.

"Josh, when we're married, things'll change. We'll settle down. You'll be all right then."

As she spoke, he tensed, and a tic in his cheek began to pulsate. His hands tightened on the steering wheel. He had to be straight with her.

"We can't think about marriage, Judy."

"Why not? Why not?"

She began to cry. He reached over and pulled her to him, her head on his shoulder, his hand stroking her on the back.

"We can't, that's all. We just can't."

She pulled away and wiped her eyes.

"All right, Josh. You go to the store. I'll bring you some supper."

He took her face in his hands. His eyes began to fill as he thought about what he was doing to her. He kissed her, held her tightly for a long moment. Then he left the car with a quick "see you later" and then walked down the little slope of Hampshire to Coventry.

It was busy tonight. Jack Gardner, the policeman, returned Josh's wave from across the way. The usual kibitzers were in front of the deli. The antique shop was crowded, the record shop was noisy, and "Tommy's" was busy as always. The food they served was tasty, healthy and came to the table surprisingly fast. The drugstore's doors were open. It had been a reasonably warm day for May in Cleveland. The head shop had its usual curiosity seekers and buyers and the laundromat had people waiting their turn.

Josh opened the door to the store, removed the "BACK IN AN

HOUR" sign that hung from the door and turned the lights on, bathing the shop and the storefront window with brightness. It had been ten long years that the store remained open with the help of his father's family. They'd waited till he'd finished college and then turned it over to him. He remembered the conversation they'd had, Uncle Bert and he.

"You're only thirteen, Josh. We should really sell the store and invest the money for you."

"No. I want to keep it going, but I can't without your help."

Bert sighed, "All right. All right. We'll manage somehow."

Josh recalled fondly, as he sat at his desk behind the counter, how his aunts kept it open during the day and his uncles at night. They were the giving kind of people and kept it going for him until he'd graduated from Case Western.

TONIGHT, AFTER TWO CUSTOMERS HAD COME AND GONE, he began to tense. He unlocked the drawer of the desk and took the gun out. He looked at its shiny blue steel—cold to the touch. *The only warmth it'll ever bring is the warm blood that'll flow when the trigger is pulled. It'll do what I want it to*, he told himself. He put the safety catch on and put it in his inside jacket pocket. As perceptive as Judith was, he knew she'd never ever imagine what he was going to do. He hadn't told her that Barker was back in town.

Sam from the Square Record had told him, "I hear he's bussing in one of the Shaker Square restaurants, Josh."

"Who told you?" he'd asked Sam.

"No one, Josh. I overheard some people in the shop."

The news sent shivers throughout his body. His muscles tensed and from that moment on, morning, evening, whenever he could, he sought Steve Barker out. And he found him. And once he had found him, he followed him home. "Home" for Barker was a basement suite on Superior Road in East Cleveland.

As Josh sat in his shop waiting for Judith, he thought of the face to face meeting with Barker that was so close. The tic in his face began to jump again as Judith came in and she saw that she shouldn't have talked marriage today.

"Here's your supper, Josh." Her voice was subdued.

He looked at her. There were only sad days ahead. "Thanks," he said.

He took the brown bag and walked to the rear of the store and put it in the refrigerator. His insides felt like thousands of spiders were crawling there, and he started for the front of the store to get Judy to leave.

"Thanks, Judy. You go on home now. I'll see you later."

They kissed goodbye and as soon as she'd left, he cut the lights and locked up. He patted his inside pocket. The gun was there. How would Barker react? He wanted him to suffer and he'd do what he had to do. But even as he planned the night, flashes of his learning and of his beliefs caused his thoughts to spin and turn in kaleidoscope fashion.

Barker's basement suite was not only damp and musty, it was filthy. Josh had some keys made and he'd been in there when Barker was away. He was surprised how easy it was. With some simple equipment one could make keys and get in any place. Now he knew the layout. You entered by the kitchen, which had one small window. You walked down a short hall, past the bathroom and into the bedroom. That was it. For the past two weeks he'd watched Barker come home. The time was always just about the same. He even watched his movements from the driveway alongside the apartment. He knew all of Barker's habits from the time he came home till he went to bed.

Now tonight was the night. Steve would get home about 10 p.m. Then, Josh figured, he'd wait till 11:30 and go in. Just so it was still ten years to the day. He walked down Coventry to Superior Road. Then down Superior to the top of the hill. There, the playground at Rockefeller Park was across the street from Barker's apartment. He'd wait there and watch till he came home. As he waited, the temperature dropped and Josh trembled without knowing whether it was tension or the cool of the night. A breeze caused the swings to move back and forth, back and forth, and the creaking sound of metal turning on metal caused Josh to jump. Then he heard—or thought he heard, "Higher, daddy, higher!" Despite himself he turned and looked. The breeze wasn't that strong was it? Then it suddenly stopped as if a hand had reached out to hold it. He watched the weeds bend and flatten. Was it the breeze? He got up from his crouched position and closed his ears to sound and his mind to anything but his purpose.

TIME NEVER SEEMED TO DRAG SO MUCH. FINALLY 10 o'clock came, and Barker was on time. Josh watched him enter and then settle back. If Barker ran true to form, he'd watch television on his little set in the bedroom and go to sleep at 11 p.m. sharp. Josh had learned his every move and turn before deciding that he'd best get him at home. He looked at his watch. Ten o'clock. *He'll be asleep at 11 and by 11:20 it'll be time.* The seconds and minutes moved more slowly than they ever had before.

Finally, an hour and twenty minutes more had gone by and Joshua was now standing in front of Barker's apartment door, key in hand. He

turned it in the lock and began to inch it open very, very slowly—a fraction of an inch at a time. It didn't squeak anymore. It did on Josh's first visit there, and the second time he came back he oiled it. There'd be no warning from Barker when he entered. Then, once he was in and standing over his sleeping body, gun in his hand, he'd awaken him so that he'd know what was happening. HE HAS TO KNOW.

He continued inching the door open very carefully. If Barker was awake in the kitchen he wouldn't let him get the jump on him. He stopped for a moment, pulled the gun out with his right hand and then with his other hand opened the door quickly.

His face was assailed with an acrid, irritating odor that filled his nostrils causing him to choke. It was gas.

He closed the door quickly and put the gun in his pocket. Then with his handkerchief over his face, he rushed in and shut the stove off. Choking, he grabbed a pot from the sink and smashed the small window over it, wet a towel and covered his face again.

The basement suite was damp. Barker must have lit the stove and somehow the flames went out. He made his way back to the bedroom. There was Barker, face down on his bed. There was no movement.

Would he be deprived of his chance? He stepped over to the bed and turned Barker onto his back and picked up his hand. There was a slight pulse. He slapped his face trying to wake him, let him know what it was like. Nothing happened except for a slight groan. Josh took the gun from his pocket, staring at the motionless—unseeing killer. He released the safety—AN EYE FOR AN EYE!

JOSH WALKED TOWARD THE PUBLIC PHONE. WELL—IT was over now. He dropped a quarter in the slot and dialed. It rang and almost at once he heard, "Fire Department, Johnson speaking."

"Officer, send a rescue squad to 11112 Superior. Basement apartment. Gas leak. A man almost died there. You can still save him."

"Who's this?"

He thought for a moment, then answered, "Someone who came back."

He put the phone back on the hook.

Two men—he realized—two men had almost died there. He looked up at the stars. The ghosts had gone and what had happened was not his to change. He must tell Judith. He headed for Hampshire Road. •

Mike's Mail

SMUT?

It has always been my policy to have your magazine available for my students to read. I will no longer put it on my readers' shelf. Also, Buzz Dixon will not be read by my students.

What was a fairly good, well-balanced short story was too *smutty* for general, let alone young, consumption. I am cancelling my subscription to your mag.

I guess you prefer a tarnished image. I should have guessed by your August cover; I will also no longer be a reader of your material.

H.F. Nessen

2115 Fardown Ave.

Salt Lake City, Utah 84121

V. Pres. So. Valley Chapter,

League of Utah Writers

Sometimes I wonder if a few of our readers and I are living on the same planet. This suspicion arises when I get a letter like this. Regarding the cover, once again we are treated to the fact that smut is often in the eye of the beholder. I reread SPIDERS and discovered one paragraph that might have upset you, in which the protagonist is trying to get friendly with a ladyfriend—and fails. What upsets me is the willingness of a person to throw out an entire magazine and the entire past, present and future works of an author because of one paragraph—and worse, force his actions and beliefs on other people. If any of you readers out there agree with me, let's boycott the entire state of UTAH!

SHE LOVES LUCY

Is there any way a new Mike Shayne fan can obtain copies of the older books? I am a big fan of Mike's, but a bigger one of Lucy Hamilton. I have acquired most of the books from second-hand book stores but have failed to get MICHAEL SHAYNE'S LONG CHANCE, in which Mike meets Lucy. Can you help? Thanks.

Barbara Lambert

313 Ninth St.

Mountain Pine, Arkansas 71956

This was indeed the novel in which Mike meets Lucy, the ninth novel in the series published in 1944 by Dodd, Mead and later reprinted in paperback. Your best bet is still the used book stores, but if you've exhausted Mountain Pine's resources, you might have a friend in a larger city search for you. Meanwhile, if any of you readers out there can help this nice lady, please do so. You're welcome!

★ ★ ★

Got something you'd like to say to Mike, the authors, the editor, the publisher, the art director, other readers? Well, don't be bashful. Write it out and send it in, whether it's a brickbat or a bouquet. These are real letters written by real people, and without them we don't have a Mike's Mail. The address is:

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BOOK REVIEWS by JOHN BALL

Everyone familiar with the mystery/suspense field knows that Mary Higgins Clark is a class act. She has just proved it again with her newest book, *Stillwatch*. In Washington, D.C. TV interviewer Pat (for Patricia) Traymore is preparing a documentary on tough Senator Abigail Jennings, who is about to be named to replace an ailing Vice President. Digging for background and information on her subject, Miss Traymore runs afoul of Washington politics, her own boss, the senator, and an unseen person who keeps warning her by notes and calls to get out of her Georgetown house. No one other than Pat knows that the house is actually hers and that in her early childhood her mother and father were killed there almost before her eyes. Mrs. Clark is masterful as she builds the suspense, slowly and carefully, until it reaches the screaming point. If you have not been reading Mary Higgins Clark, you don't know what you've been missing. (Simon and Schuster, \$14.95)

★ ★ ★

Colin D. Peel gives us plenty of action in his new book *Snowtrap*, which starts out with a bang and goes on from there. Unfortunately, a good deal of suspension of disbelief is required. Two military ships are mistaken for ore carriers and an East German agent, fluent in English, also proves able to convince native Norwegians that he is one of them. The goings on are sometimes little short of frantic. This is a lightweight entertainment impossible to be taken seriously. (Doubleday Crime Club, \$11.95)

★ ★ ★

Robert Barnard keeps steadily producing superior books in the genre. His latest, *Corpse in a Gilded Cage*, is highly entertaining and sometimes hilarious. One of the most majestic, and huge, of the stately homes of England, and an impressive series of titles that go with it, have been inherited by an unprepared family that solidly belongs to "the lower middle classes." Unembarrassed by any pretense of culture, and with a drivingly ambitious woman taking command, the family moves in and the uproar begins. Mr. Barnard is very deft in keeping things just within bounds. There is a nice murder to brighten things up and a most unexpected detective to unravel it all. Definitely recommended. (Scribners, \$12.95)

★ ★ ★

The Horror/occult field, which is dedicated to longer and better nightmares has a new magazine of limited circulation called *Damnations*. It's edited by R.L. Leming. The first issue contains twenty stories, none overly long. At least two of them rate four screams. The Strange Company, Box 864, Madison, WI. Price not given.

★ ★ ★

While on the subject, Arkham House specializes in works of supernatural fiction. The latest offering is Michael Bishop's *Who Made Stevie Cry?* Stevie is a female free-lance writer whose typewriter gradually takes over her life, a la HAL, the computer in 2001. (Take each letter in HAL's name, move it up one in the alphabet, and see what you get.) This new offering has imaginative photo illustrations by Jeffrey K. Potter plus Arkham's usual high quality manufacturing and D.T.'s inspired artwork. (Arkham House, Sauk City, WI, \$15.95)

★ ★ ★

Turning now to true crime, Thomas Larry Adcock has an unusually interesting offering in his *Precinct 19*, written about and around New York City's "most high-powered police station." A great deal of research has gone into this book, which reads like superior fiction. The British like the word "thriller." All of the ingredients are here and they all happen to be true. The description of Times Square (pages 144/59) is memorable. Whether or not you happen to like The Big Apple, this

fascinating account of one segment of the city is not to be missed. The author, an experienced police reporter, has done an extraordinary job. (Doubleday, \$15.95)

★ ★ ★

Walter J. Sheldon introduces auxiliary bishop Paul Burdock of Washington, D.C. in his new book *Rites of Murder*. When a high class call girl is murdered on the streets, His Grace decides to investigate. His reason: the victim left a small daughter who is about to be evicted from parochial school with no place to go. His efforts are stimulated by a number of additional murders and severely discouraged by his ecclesiastical superiors and his friend the Chief of police. His character even comes into question when he is seen to pick up a prostitute on the street (only to question her, of course). The bishop sorts it all out in an engaging, if not memorable, debut. (St. Martin's Press, \$13.95)

★ ★ ★

There is a steady parade of new books about the last days of the Third Reich and its key figures, most of which are in a "what might have happened if" mold. The latest is *The Leader and the Damned* by Colin Forbes. This time a plot to assassinate Hitler succeeds two years before his supposed death. He is immediately replaced by a skilled actor trained to take over should it become necessary. The rest follows a now well-established pattern with the fate of Martin Bormann dealt with at the finish. Incidentally, there is some evidence to support the author's hypothesis. (Atheneum, \$15.95)

★ ★ ★

Students and devoted readers of the mystery/suspense genre will be very interested in *Victorian Masters of Mystery* by Audrey Peterson. This is not an anthology, but a series of essays about Wilkie Collins, Doyle (she means Watson, of course), Dickens, Le Fanu, and some lesser lights in the field. (Anna Katherine Green perhaps deserves a somewhat higher status than is indicated here.) Professor Peterson writes in a very clear and engaging style without excessive academic pomp and circumlocution. She has much to say and says it well. Recommended. (Ungar, \$11.95 in hardback, \$6.95 in paper)

This month's British "cozy" is John Penn's *A Will To Kill*. Again we are in an English country village where a man with no visible enemies is found in the woods shot in the back. He has been financially depleted until he has had to sell his ancestral home secretly to an American cousin. Hints of blackmail are in the air as Detective Superintendent George Thorne takes over. The pace here is leisurely, the violence minimal, the investigation more or less standard as the killer is run to ground. John Penn (a pseudonym) has been improving as he goes along: this is his best effort to date. (Scribner's, \$12.95)

★ ★ ★

PAPERBACK NOTES: Peter Dickinson won the coveted British Golden Dagger Award for the best novel of the year with his *The Old English Peep Show*, now available in paperback from Pantheon at \$2.95. Also offered by the same publisher is his much-praised *Hindsight*, also \$2.95 . . . Leslie Halliwell offers seventeen supernatural stories in *The Ghost of Sherlock Holmes*, an original paperback by Granada (London). The Holmes story, while fairly short, is delightful. You will probably find this at a specialty mystery bookshop of which there are now many. U.S. price not given . . . John Mortimer, Q.C., who has given us Rumpole of the Bailey, has put together *Famous Trials*, nine cases selected from the well-known, but hard to find series published in England. Dr. Crippen and Madeleine Smith are included. If true crime interests you, this anthology is not to be missed. Penguin, \$5.95 (quality paperback) . . . Bill Granger's November Man is back in his *The British Cross*, now available from Pocketbooks. If you like espionage fiction, Granger has a growing reputation in the field, \$3.50 . . . Dr. Thomas Noguchi's best selling *Coroner* is also offered in paper by Pocketbooks. The medical evidence concerning the deaths of many celebrities is included, from Robert Kennedy to John Belushi, \$3.50 . . . Elmore Leonard's novel *La Brava* has been attracting a lot of deserved attention. Avon now has it in paperback for \$3.95 . . . The enterprising Academy Chicago publishers now have Shelley Smith's *Afternoon to Kill* in paper for \$4.95. It's an unusual mystery with a very different setting. The same publisher also has Francis Clifford's classic, *The Naked Runner*, at the same price.

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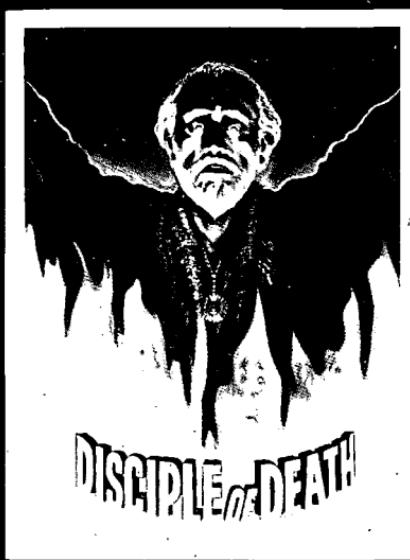
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